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The Performance of Gender  
with particular reference to the plays of Shakespeare

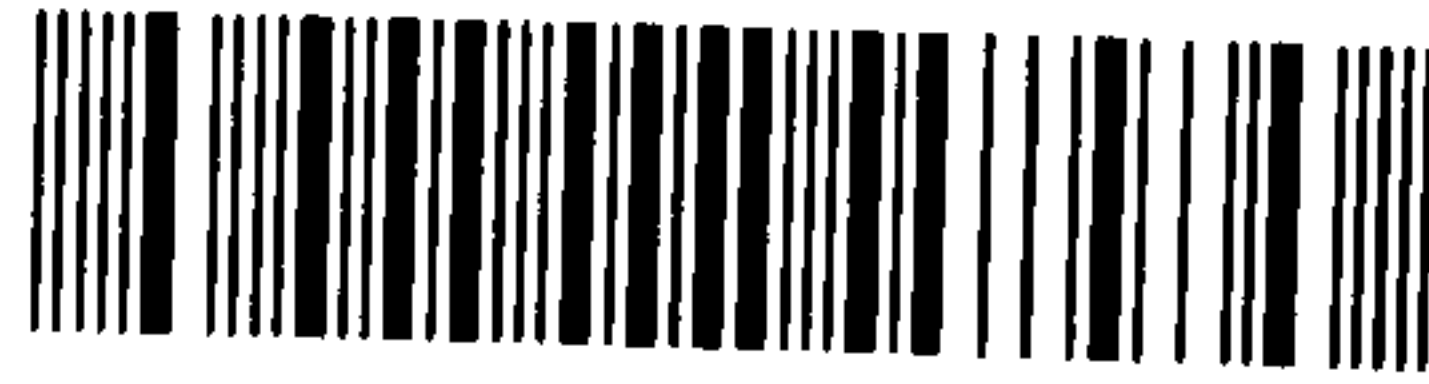
A thesis submitted to Middlesex University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

An analytical history of the representation of gender on the English stage from Shakespeare to modern times is followed by a detailed examination of the National Theatre of Great Britain's production of 'As You Like It' in 1967, the first production of a play by Shakespeare for over three hundred years in which the female parts were played by male actors. Subsequent cross-cast productions of Shakespeare's plays by Glasgow Citizen's Theatre, Prospect theatre Company, Lindsay Kemp, Théâtre du Soleil and Goodman Theatre Chicago are discussed and the views of directors and critics of those productions analysed.

The thesis then presents the results of a series of workshops with actors into the playing of gender and examines, by means of an experiment employing Gender Schema Theory, how actors construct gender in a production of 'Twelfth Night'.

The final part of the thesis describes a controlled experiment into audience perception of gender using a scene from 'Hamlet'.

Theories are presented about the nature of the performance of gender on stage and the use of theatrical conventions, the relationship between social conventions and stage conventions, about the way in which an actor builds a character, the influence of biological sex on actors' creativity, and about audience perception.

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discussion, rehearsal and the endless filling out of questionnaires and especially my supervisors who have guided me through the unfamiliar mazes of academe. Professor Leon Rubin always had his eye on the ball, even when he was half way around the world, and Professor David Marks introduced me to the world of psychology and Gender Schema Theory and helped me to apply scientific disciplines to the investigation of acting. To both Leon and David I owe a huge debt.

Luke Dixon

London

April 1998

## CHAPTER 1

The plays of Shakespeare were written to be performed by men, only men; and for a while they were. The dominant convention of Shakespeare's theatre demanded that no women were to be seen on stage as actors. The female parts were played by male actors, men and boys. This was not a new convention, though the theatres in which it was used were new, and the other conventions used in the new buildings were being invented by Shakespeare and his fellow actors. The convention of only men being actors was one which had dictated the representation of humans on stage throughout the documented history of English performance<sup>1</sup>.

Shakespeare's As You Like It was first performed in 1599. In 1642 the Puritans closed all the public playhouses in England and when they were reopened eighteen years later in 1660 it was with female actors playing the

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<sup>1</sup> This was true of both liturgical and secular drama. The Concordia Regularis of St. Ethelwold from the eleventh century shows how the coming of the three Marys to the sepulchre and their encounter with the Angel were to be represented at Mattins on Easter Day by four brothers. 'While the third lesson is being chanted, let four brethren rest themselves. Let one of these, vested in an alb, enter as though to take part in the service, and let him approach the sepulchre without attracting attention and sit there quietly with a palm in his hand. While the third response is chanted, let the remaining three follow and let them all, vested in copes, bearing in their hands thuribles with incense, and stepping delicately as those who seek something approach the sepulchre. These things are done in imitation of the angel sitting in the monument, and the women with spices coming to anoint the body of Jesus.' (from the Concordia Regularis, quoted in Nagler, p.39) I quote this at length as it is the first written record of how to play a woman in English theatre.



female roles. For the first time women actors represented women on the English stage. One convention had been exchanged for another equally as rigid. It was to be more than three hundred years before a production of a play by Shakespeare in which all the actors were men was seen on the professional stage in England, when the National Theatre revived As You Like It in 1967. For three centuries the dominant stage convention of the representation of men and women on stage remained unchallenged.

In the thirty years since that National Theatre production, the casting of male actors in female roles has become an occasional but increasingly frequent *anti*-convention in the performance of the plays of Shakespeare. Today it is common enough to be thought of as an alternative convention. Further anti- and alternative conventions have developed from it, including that of casting all the roles in a production, male and female, with female actors.

This thesis sets out to examine the history of the conventions of the representation of men and women, of gender, in the performance of the plays of Shakespeare. It seeks to explain why the rigidity of stage convention relaxed in 1967 and how the breaking of that convention allowed for the growth of alternative performance traditions and conventions. The development of cross-gender casting in the plays of Shakespeare is charted and related to changing social conventions around the representation of gender.

I will put forward theories about why the revival took place, analyse the views of directors as to the uses of such casting and its implications for casting in the theatre in general, and demonstrate the growth of new performance traditions based on such casting.

An analysis of the uses, dramatic, artistic and sexual-political, of cross-gender casting is followed by the postulation of theories about the playing of gender as a result of practical workshops into the artistic possibilities and practical difficulties for actor, director and audience offered by such casting.

I will also show how an actor's construction of gender on stage relates to the theatrical construction of character in general and how those involved in the complicity of a theatrical performance suspend their disbeliefs when the actors are of a different gender to the characters they are playing on stage. I will demonstrate, by experiment, that female actors and male actors create characters on stage in different ways, dependent upon their, the actor's, gender.

I will argue that in any society there will always be a dominant set of stage conventions which reflect social conventions and show how in a multi-cultural society these conventions will always reflect those of the dominant culture. I will show how in a period of social change such change is reflected on stage allowing new conventions to become acceptable or be experimented with just



as such conventions are being questioned in society as a whole. I will show how social change may be such as to permit its own reflection in changed conventions on the stage.

Using the convention of the representation of gender as a model I will postulate that non-dominant or alternative stage conventions will always be viewed through the lens of the dominant convention. That, for instance, theatre-in-the-round is always seen through the lens of the proscenium arch; that 'colour blind' casting is seen through the lens of colour specific casting; that Pepys saw women playing women through the lens of men playing women; that the audience at the National Theatre in 1967 saw through the reverse of Pepys' lens; that any production of a Greek play today which uses masks, has to be viewed through the lens of a theatre of mask-less actors. That, in other words, the dominant convention always acts as an intervening convention to an alternative convention, even if the alternative convention was once the dominant.

I will examine the problems that arise when staging a play for which the dominant conventions for which it was written no longer apply and whether the convention of gender representation being used in a production affects the job of the actor in playing a role.

I will examine the acceptability to an audience of alternative conventions; to

what extent the dominant convention distorts alternative conventions; how far the dominant convention intervenes between audience and alternative convention; and whether an alternative convention will always be seen negatively because it is not the dominant convention.

I will question whether social conventions reflect stage convention and how far one affects the other. I will ask whether there can ever be gender neutral casting (or by extension colour blind casting) without a society that is itself gender-neutral and colour-blind. I will argue that an anti-convention (for instance Takarasuka, the Japanese all-female company) only serves to reinforce the dominant convention.

I will show that while we can know what an Elizabethan audience *looked at* on stage we can never know what it was they *saw* because even with an all-male cast of actors today we can only view a performance through the modifying lens of our own dominant post-Restoration convention of the representation of gender. But I will also show how the multiplicity of convention that comes when a play written for one convention is presented through other conventions can only enrich our understanding of Shakespearian texts that themselves deal with the whole issue of the performance of gender.



## STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY

In Shakespeare's time all the actors were male. Until the closure of the theatres by the Puritans in 1642, the history of English drama is one of almost exclusively male acting. Only with the Restoration of the monarchy and the reopening of the theatres in 1660, did the first female actor take to the English stage. For over three hundred years, from 1660 until 1967 the governing convention of the English theatre was one in which female actors played female characters and male actors played male characters. There were very few exceptions to this convention and almost all within the twentieth century.

On 3rd October 1967 an all male production of As You Like It by the National Theatre of Great Britain opened at The Old Vic Theatre in London. It was the first time since the Restoration that a play of Shakespeare's had been seen in London in a professional production with all male cast. Other such productions followed. Today such productions have become commonplace.

The thesis traces the history of gender casting on the English stage, with particular emphasis on Elizabethan conventions and practice, followed by a detailed analysis of the 1967 As You Like It and discussion of three other British productions from the 1960s and 1970s: Giles Havergal's Hamlet at Glasgow Citizen's Theatre in 1970, Toby Robertson's Pericles for Prospect Theatre in 1973, Lindsay Kemp's A Midsummer Night's Dream in 1979. Two further productions are used as points of reference to show the use of

cross-gender performances in subsequent decades and within non-British socio-theatrical contexts. These are: Ariane Mnouchkine's Twelfth Night for Théâtre du Soliel in 1982 and Neil Bartlett's Twelfth Night for the Goodman Theatre in Chicago in 1992. Interviews with the directors of these revivals explore the context of the productions, the reasons behind the casting decisions, the rehearsal process and the reaction to the stagings. Reference is also be made to my own extensively cross-gender cast productions of The Dream, Pericles, Romeo and Juliet and The Winter's Tale for The Deal Theatre Project during the 1980's, and to my all-female productions of Macbeth and Hamlet for the SOHO group in the 1990s.

The historical research is followed by the results of a series of practical workshops with actors. These looked at general issues around playing across gender (Middlesex University), at the specifics of creating a Shakespearian role through cross-gender casting (The Actors Centre, London) and at the challenges of creating gender as part of a role (The Actors Centre, London).

Using the paradigm of Gender Schema Theory I will show how an actor's representation of their own gender relates to their representation of the gender of the role they are playing and how the job of the actors is related to the stage conventions of gender representation. I will show how the biological sex of the actor has a direct relationship with the way in which they create a character.



Finally through a controlled experiment with audiences, I will examine the extent to which the spectator will accept different stage conventions and the degree to which one stage convention is more acceptable than another.

### Methodology

The research provided a number of methodological challenges in order to cover the range of subject matter included, from the history of the performance of gender in Shakespeare's time, by way of detailed analysis of productions from the 1960s, to an investigation of perception of gender by contemporary audiences. A variety of methodological approaches were used as appropriate to the different parts of the thesis.

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH OF PRIMARY SOURCES was used for contemporaneous accounts through reviews, press coverage, actors' interviews and so on of the principal productions referred to.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS were used with directors of productions studied. These were recorded on audio tape.

STRUCTURED WORKSHOPS with both student and professional actors were undertaken with selected and self-selected groups of actors.

STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRES and OPEN RESPONSE FORMS were used to record responses from workshop participants.

CONTROLLED EXPERIMENTS were used to apply gender schema theory to the investigation of actors' creation of character in actual production situations and to investigate audience's perception of gender in actual theatre

situations.

COMPUTER AIDED STATISTICAL ANALYSIS was used in drawing conclusions from actors and audience questionnaires.

A more detailed explanation of scientific methodology employed in the actor and audience research is to be found in the relevant chapters.

## GENDER AND CROSS GENDER PERFORMANCE - A CONTEXT AND A DEFINITION OF TERMS

‘I didn’t cross-cast the play, Shakespeare did,’ said Neil Bartlett in discussing his 1992 production of Twelfth Night for the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. (Bartlett, interview with the writer) Bartlett is wrong. Shakespeare did not cross-cast his plays. He worked within the only convention available to him. Indeed the very nature of gender as we understand it today would have meant nothing to him. The connection of gender to biological sex and to sexuality is a recent late twentieth century concept. For Shakespeare a gender was, from its Latin root ‘genus’, a type. The word’s principle connotations would have been grammatical. The idea of gender as ‘a social construct, made up of learned values and beliefs.’ (Senelick p.1) is one which developed alongside the changing performance conventions, which are examined in this thesis, in the late sixties and early seventies. It was not until 1894 that Edward Carpenter was able to write that: ‘It is beginning to be recognised that the



sexes do not or should not normally form two groups hopelessly isolated in habit and feeling from each other, but that they should rather represent the two poles of one group - which is the human race.' (Carpenter p. 189)

Shakespeare lived in a Platonic universe which saw not a bi-polar gender continuum between male and female but rather two clear and distinct types that were 'man' and 'woman'. In Aristophanes' speech in his Symposium Plato tells of the original state of man when he came in three forms:

'...long ago our nature was not what it is now, but very different. there were three kinds of human being...not two as there are now, male and female. In addition to these, there was a third, a combination of these two; its name survives, though the kind itself has vanished. At that time, you see, the word 'androgynous' really meant something: a form made up of male and female elements, though now there's nothing but the word....' (Plato, p. 25)

Bem reclaimed that word in 1974 with her exposition of Gender Schema Theory. (Bem, *passim*, see Chapter 7).

After the Greek Gods split humans in half, these halves have continued in a constant search each for their 'other half'. This is the world that Shakespeare's Rosalind finds herself in. For her there can be no middle ground. She is either Rosalind or Ganymede. For the male actor playing Rosalind there was also no middle ground. He was either himself or Rosalind.

Or Rosalind as Ganymede, searching romantically for her other half only by

becoming her other half, what I will call her *gender other*. The middle ground that we can see today - the no-(wo)man's land - is a viewpoint that can only be seen from our post-Platonic, post-Foucaultian position<sup>2</sup>. As the actor playing Rosalind says in the play's Epilogue 'My way is to conjure you' (As You Like It v.iv.208) but his conjuring allows him to be one gender or the other, and by implication both, hinting what is to come in the future stage history of the play.

Plato also writes 'in praise of love' and this is of a love of a principally homosexual nature: of man for boy and of boy as the passage to beauty. Here then in the writing of Plato are the seeds of the two central issues that characterise discussion of cross-gender casting: the idea of the other half and the complementary nature of sexuality. And the idea of homosexual love.

Twentieth Century thought on the nature of sexuality has been strongly influenced by Michel Foucault. His History of Sexuality, Part One was

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<sup>2</sup> The painter Paul Gauguin found a middle ground in Tahiti where some men dressed as women to do women's work, the Mahus, a third gender who existed outside the social categories of their own people. On his arrival in Tahiti, Gauguin was immediately jeered because the Tahitians, despite their Mahus, had never seen a man with long hair. Because of his long hair, his 'craftwork' and his lack of a mutilated penis, Gauguin acquired in the eyes of the Tahitians a *sexual indeterminacy* that may 'have permitted him a form of cultural intercourse - and therefore also a chance for rich and compelling artistic engagement - that few male colonials were ever granted.' (Eisenmann, p.112) A veritable Ganymede in this South Seas Forest of Arden.



published in 1976 a few years after male actors returned to representing women in the plays of Shakespeare. For Foucault:

‘Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name given to an historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledge, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power.’ (Foucault, pps 105 -6)

What we shall see is that Foucault’s ‘historical construct’ is not a constant but metamorphoses with time - that the construct Shakespeare understood is different from that *or those* that we understand today. This ‘great surface network’ of sexuality that Foucault describes finds different representations in society at different times and therefore has required different representations on the stage, has been shown and understood in different ways, at different times.

For Foucault the early Seventeenth Century, the close of Shakespeare’s age, is seen as ‘this bright day’ which he takes as the point of comparison with his own age:

‘At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common, it would seem. Sexual practices had little need for secrecy; words were said without due reticence, and things were done without too much concealment; one had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit....It was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions, when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will, and knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults: it was a period when bodies made a display of themselves.’ (Foucault, p.3)

Foucault links the advent of what he sees as ‘modern sexual repression’ with the development of capitalism in the 17th Century. For him the early 17th century, when Shakespeare was writing, was the culmination of ‘hundreds of years of open spaces and free expression.’ (Foucault, p.17)

In Foucault’s view of the world, the ‘boy’ actor playing Rosalind (I will question the whole notion of the ‘boy’ player later) was not a hermaphrodite of indistinguishable gender but a ‘knowing child’ whose gender was unnoticed by the audience. Foucault argues that before the repression of the 17th Century, the sexuality of children was largely unnoticed. This would imply, therefore, a *neutrality* for a child player on the stage rather than a cross gender. Once the ‘legitimate couple’ became the norm, the sexuality of children (with that of mad men and women, and criminals) ‘came under scrutiny’ (Foucault, p.38). If this is true, then it implies a neutrality about the boy players - *tabulae rasae* that could have gender projected onto them by author or audience; that in fact this was not cross-gender casting at all but rather neutral gender casting.

Foucault argues that homosexuality did not exist as a ‘psychological, psychiatric, medical category’ before 1870 when Carl Westphal’s article Archiv fur Neurologie turned the *act* of sodomy into ‘a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul.’ (Foucault, p.43) Sexuality had



become 'a medical and medicalizable object.' (Foucault, p.44)

In comparing the use of cross-dressing on the stage in East and West it might be useful to think in terms of Foucault's distinction between the views of sexuality in the two hemispheres: between what he terms the *ars erotica* of China, Japan, Rome, India, and the Arabo-Moslem societies, and the *scientia sexualis* of the West (Foucault, p.58 *et. seq.*)

Does this explain, in part at least, the differing theatre traditions of East and West in regard to cross-gender casting? Could it be argued that there was an *ars erotica* in 16th and 17th Century Europe which was not replaced with a *scientia sexualis* until the Enlightenment; and that this *ars erotica* required, for whatever reason, a single-gendered actor representation of gender on stage? <sup>3</sup>

Shakespeare inherited the convention of male only actors. It was a longstanding convention dating back to when, according to Ferris: '...the early [Christian] church included theatrical events in its attack on pagan ritual....' (Ferris p.34) For Ferris, 'The Christian barrage on theatre encompassed a wider front than paganism and its accompanying *spectacular*; it also led an

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<sup>3</sup> In the Indian state of Maharashtra the most popular form of theatre in the indigenous language, Marathi, uses only male actors because when the first plays were performed, which was as recently as 1843, it was still taboo for women to appear on stage.

attack on notions of artistic representation and, by inference, on the realm of imagination itself. In the impassioned condemnation of theatre entitled De Spectaculis, Tertulian puts forward his own conspiracy theory: that behind Roman theatrical representations lurks the devil ready to ensnare innocent victims. The concept of mimesis, the art of representation through theatrical pretence, does not exist in Tertulian's view of play-acting....' (Ferris p.34)

In other words there was no distinction, to the early Church, between the *representation* of an act on stage, and the act (eg adultery or murder) itself. With the conversion of Rome to Christianity came the first closure of the theatres, by Justinian in the 6th Century. Professional actors disappear until Shakespeare's time - for a millennium.

If the concept of gender as a manifestation of biological sex and of sexuality is absent from the world in which the plays of Shakespeare were written and, for three hundred years performed, then so is the concept of the representation of gender. The Old Testament edict that, 'The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garments: for all that do so are an abomination unto the LORD thy God.' (Deuteronomy Chapter 22 verse 5) was the basis of the sumptuary laws which governed the indication of biological sex through clothing throughout the stage history of the plays of Shakespeare. By the late 1960s, as I will show, these laws had become conventions but conventions which began to be challenged and broken. And with this came the conventions and styles of 'androgynous'



dressing and a return to a pre-Platonic time when, 'the word 'androgynous' really meant something: a form made up of male and female elements.' (Plato, p.25) In the late twentieth century however these were external elements of dress that allowed for the indication or expression of a range of different gender identities and also of different sexualities. Gender is no longer synonymous with sex.

#### TOWARDS SOME DEFINITIONS

The terms cross-dressing and cross-casting are not interchangeable though often used as if they were synonymous. Confusion as to their use recurs in much of the research material collected for this thesis. Peter Ackroyd provides the simplest definition of cross-dressing as being, 'When one sex adopts the clothes of the other.' (Ackroyd, p.10) As Ackroyd points out, the word transvestism has the same meaning but carries the assumptions of fetishistic obsessions but they are assumptions that Ackroyd himself ignores, using the term transvestism to describe 'those occasions when a man puts on a woman's clothes, or a woman adopts a man's, *for whatever purpose and with whatever effect.*' (Ackroyd p.10)

From a more overtly gay perspective, and in dealing with the whole issue of 'drag' Kris Kirk says of cross-dressing, 'I use the word advisedly because it encompasses more than drag (which is widely assumed to be theatre- and

performance- based) and transvestism (which is widely assumed to have overtly sexual overtones). Both assumptions ... are too simplistic anyway.’  
(Kirk, p.8)

In psychological terms, the separation of the terms ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ began with the introduction of an ethnomethodological approach to the subject. Kessler and McKenna (1978) refer to men and women as two genders, distinguishing the two on the basis of social criteria. They use the term ‘sex’ for distinction based on biological criteria. Gender is attributed sociologically on the basis of a variety of bodily and behavioural cues. Just as it happens with social convention so it happens with theatrical convention. In watching a performance by an actor an audience makes decisions about gender in just the same way that individual members of that audience would make decisions about each other’s gender in the bar at the interval. But the conventions of the stage allow an actor to project the gender of their character rather than of themselves, through a variety of socio-theatrical cues. Archer and Lloyd (1982) also adopt ‘an ethnomethodological position that implies that the very identification of an individual as male or female depends on a complex attribution process,’ (Archer and Lloyd, p.17) this process of attribution being one that will be investigated later in relation to the theatrical processes of creating character and audience cognition.

Butler argues that gender in our culture is ‘heterosexualised’:



‘The heterosexualisation of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’, where these are understood as expressive attributes of ‘male’ and female’. The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’ - that is, those in which gender does not flow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not ‘follow’ from either sex or gender.’ (Butler, p.17)

In their ‘Note on Terminology’, Conner, Sparks and Sparks say that ‘the language currently used to describe these arenas [gender and sexuality] remain in their infancy.’ They go on to argue that:

‘While we hold that gendered and sexual behaviors and identities probably result from a complex interaction of biology and societal shaping as well as, perhaps, spiritual embodiment of archetypal energies or forces, when we refer to ‘traditionally feminine’ and ‘traditionally masculine’ behaviors or identities herein, we are in this case referring to gender roles not as essential traits but rather as roles shaped by the cultures in which individuals have been reared.’ (Conner, Sparks and Sparks, p. viii)

By using the term ‘cross-dressing’ to cover ‘people who consider themselves to be men and dress in clothes or outfits which most of society associates with women.’ (Kirk, p.9), Kirk takes the term outside of a purely theatrical context and makes it gender directional specific; he was writing in 1984, a decade before the emergence of the ‘drag king’ - the female counter version of the drag queen. Watzdorf, a drag queen at Soho’s Madame Jo Jos club in the 1980s and 1990s also makes the distinction between drag and transvestism:

‘One of the most frequent misconceptions I have encountered is that drag equals transvestism. It does not. Drag is an art form in itself, whether finding expression in Kabuki or Pantomime, it remains a profession. Anyone can be a transvestite, man or woman, hairdresser or accountant. As women, our cross-dressing is legitimised and has



been since Marlene Dietrich shocked the world in a tuxedo; these days the impact has been reduced to a mere issue of fashion. This is sadly not applicable to male transvestites who, as a rule, carry their secret around with an air of guilt that could not be further removed from drag's unapologetic and cynically perverse nature....drag has less to do with being gay than being camp.' (Watzdorf, p.xiii)

Meyer links camp specifically to a gay aesthetic and even makes a division between high and low camp, calling 'High Camp', 'the grandest manifestation of the gay subcultural aesthetic.' (Meyer, p.68)

Kirk is interested in the relationship between public, private and theatrical cross-dressing, associating the rise of public cross-dressing, including its use in the world of popular music, with the 'liberation' of the gay man. 'A man,' he says, 'can only put on a skirt self consciously; however he does it, it always seems like a gesture.' (Kirk, p.9) But if cross-dressing is gestural or mimetic in social usage, can it be more than that in theatrical usage?

To what extent is the distinction between male to female and female to male cross-dressing relevant to theatrical practice and Shakespeare's practice in particular? Is not Viola putting on her breeches selfconsciously - as a gesture? Can the male actor playing Rosalind only put on her skirts self-consciously? Or can Rosalind only replace them with Ganymede's trousers with equal self consciousness? Is it different for a female actor? 'Cross-dressing', 'transvestism' and 'drag' all carry their different overtones, overtones that have changed in the three decades that are covered by the major historical

survey of this thesis. Those interviewed for this thesis often use the terms ‘cross-dress’ and ‘drag’ interchangeably, but ‘drag’ is essentially part of a limited performance tradition in which a male actor adopts a woman’s clothes but makes no attempt to disguise his male identity. ‘Transvestism’ with its social, sexual and fetishistic<sup>4</sup> overtones holds no implication of performance.

‘Cross-casting’, though originating as a term to describe the playing of one gender by another and most usually the playing of women by men, is now much more widely used and can cover a spectrum of casting whenever an actor has different attributes from the character they are playing be these attributes associated with gender, race, ethnicity or sexual preference.

For the purposes of this study:

Sex is a distinction based on biological criteria.

Gender is a distinction based on social criteria.

Cross-casting describes the convention of an actor playing a character of a different gender to their own.

Cross-dressing describes a person/character taking on the outward appearance of the gender opposite to their own, whether on stage or off.

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<sup>4</sup> Though there may be very limited situations, such as the annual Rubber Ball in London where the sexual satisfaction to be derived from a particular type of dressing can have a performance element and be a shared experience.

Sometimes both terms apply to a single performance, especially in Shakespearian comedy. In the first production of Twelfth Night at the Middle Temple in London in 1602, a 'boy' actor would have been *cross-cast* in the female role of Viola but later *cross-dressed* as a boy when the character of Viola disguises herself as Cesario. These then are some of the contextual, methodological and terminological issues which provide a framework for this thesis.



## CHAPTER 2

In this chapter I trace the history of the representation of women in the plays of Shakespeare on the English stage and the conventions which have governed that representation. I show how one convention has always been dominant to the exclusion of any other. I examine the way in which audiences have responded to stage conventions of the representation of women, demonstrating a link between stage conventions and social conventions. I also investigate what was required of the actors that played women on stage - asking what an actor did and what an audience saw - and draw some conclusions about the nature of playing gender on stage, that will inform the experiments with actors in the later chapters.

From the first closure of the theatres by the Emperor Justinian until the opening of The Theatre by Burbage in London a thousand years later in 1576, there were no professional actors in England, men or women. By the time of Gosson's comments about actors, the professional playhouse and the professional - male - actor were commonplace. 'Our Players are not as the players beyond sea, a sort of squinting bawdie Comedians, that have whores and common curtizens to playe women's parts'. (Gosson, quoted Davies, p.8)

Gosson in his Plays Confuted in Five Actions was writing in 1582, the year Shakespeare married Ann Hathaway and was at the start of his career as a playwright. Shakespeare was writing for a theatre in which actors were 'transvestites by necessity' (Gibson, p.6). The female roles were acted by the

so-called 'boy players' and one company at least 'The Children of the Chapel' was made up entirely of boy actors - Hamlet's 'little eyases'. Male actors playing female characters was the English tradition - the only convention known on the English stage. The Mystery Plays from 1311 when the Council of Vierre created the Feast of Corpus Christi and allowed the performance of liturgical drama by the laity, until 1580 when the last complete cycle was given in Coventry close to the sixteen year old Shakespeare's birthplace, were annual stagings of stories from the Bible and the life of Christ mounted by Guilds, the keepers of the 'mysteries' of their trades. These were inevitably all-male organisations. The performances were large scale open air events given in the vernacular. Before the Council of Vierre, theatre was confined (apart from the folk rituals of the Mummers plays with their pre-Christian origins) to the churches, where liturgical plays were given in Latin in performances sung by the clergy, a clergy that was then, as until very recently, male.

As we have seen all Shakespeare's actors were male, men and boys. The great mature female roles in his plays, Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra and so on, as well as the younger female characters in the comedies who survive by disguising themselves as men, Viola, Rosalind and the rest, were written to be performed not by mature women or young girls, but by men and boys. It is a mistake to use the term 'boy players' to cover all the male actors who played female parts or to assume that the word boy would have the same connotations to an



Elizabethan audience as it does to an audience today. The term ‘boy player’ though now a commonplace used to the exclusion of all others, is in many ways an erroneous one that raises images today that would not be recognisable to Shakespeare’s audience. As Joy Leslie Gibson persuasively argues (Gibson *passim*) boys of Shakespeare’s time would be considerably more mature than boys of the same age today both in terms of life (and death) experience, and in terms of vocal ability. The boys may paradoxically have reached sexual maturity at a later age than today so it may be that the ‘boys’ first playing these parts were 18 year olds who had been acting professionally from the age of 13. When Flute in ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’ says, ‘Nay, faith, let me not play a woman; I have a beard coming’ (A Midsummer Night’s Dream 1.ii. 50), the line could be read to be indicative of his age in a way a modern audience does not understand and was not necessarily as comic when written as it may appear to be today. These eighteen year old males playing females were living in an age when the average male life expectancy was less than 40. In the National Theatre’s As You Like It which I look at in depth in the next chapter, male actors in their late twenties were playing the same parts in an age when the average life expectancy would have been more than twice that of Shakespeare’s time.

Exact comparisons are difficult to make. (Wrigley and Schofield *et al*) The first official census was not undertaken in Britain until 1801. Michael Anderson estimates the male life expectancy (excluding infant mortality) in

the second half of the eighteenth century to have been ‘around 36’. (Anderson, p.15) Wrigley and Schofield give an estimate of life expectancy from birth in 1591 of 35.5 and in 1596 of 37.7 and in 1601 of 38.1. (Wrigley and Schofield, p.230) As You Like It was written in 1599. They work on five year periods centring on the years indicated and make no distinction between male and female life expectancies. These figures do not indicate a steady growth in life expectancy, which was as high as 41.7 in the period centring on 1581 and as low as 34.0 in that centring on 1626. For a male born in Britain at the end of the twentieth century life expectancy is 78.4 years. For women it is 83.5. (English Life Tables, No.15) If, for the sake of illustration, we take the figure of 36 years as the life expectancy of an actor in the 1590s and 78 as the life expectancy of an actor in the 1990s, we can see that on a purely arithmetical basis, an actor aged say 26 in a production in the second half of the twentieth century would be the age equivalent of an actor aged 12 in a production in the second half of the sixteenth century. Perhaps it is more useful to see the term in relation to the way in which it is still commonly used in theatre today. A company of actors will always be divided into two types: boys and girls irrespective of age or sexuality. In the Elizabethan theatre perhaps the terms were simply boys and men again irrespective of age and sexuality.

The directors interviewed for this thesis were unanimously of the view that it cannot have been possible for all the female roles in the plays to have been played by boys of whatever age and that there must have been a tradition of



older perhaps comic male actors who took on such roles as the Nurse in Romeo and Juliet. The complexity and variety of the female roles in the plays is such that they must have demanded a matching complexity and variety of actor to play them.<sup>1</sup>

Just as we should not assume that the males playing female roles would be thought of as 'boys' by Shakespeare's audience, so, in this neo-Platonic world, the males playing female roles would not be thought by their fellow performers or their audience to be homosexual. As Bray says, '...the terms in which we now speak of homosexuality cannot readily be translated into those of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.' (Bray, p. 17) Bray rightly points out that, 'To talk of an individual in this period as being or not being 'a homosexual' is an anachronism and ruinously misleading. The temptation to debauchery, from which homosexuality was not clearly distinguished, was accepted as part of the common lot, be it never so abhorred.' (Bray, p.16)

What an audience saw on Shakespeare's stage then were young male performers playing female roles: actors that were, given their late sexual maturity, Foucault's 'knowing children' but whose sexuality as we understand

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<sup>1</sup> My own experience of directing Romeo and Juliet with middle age male actors as Lady Capulet and the Nurse would support this view and indeed I would argue that to make sense of Juliet's predicament, the age of the actors playing the parts is more important in terms of storytelling than the gender of the actors.

the term today would pass unnoticed. The audience, knowing no other stage convention and never having seen a female actor represent a female character on stage would be unable to imagine an alternative convention and would see only the character and pay no attention to the gender of the actor. Neither would the audience bring a homosexual interpretation to what they saw. As we have seen, the term would have been meaningless. An Elizabethan audience would not have interpreted what they saw on stage in terms of gender or sexuality as we understand those terms. An all-male cast was all they would have been able to read. They would not have any reason or need to interpret the interface between actor gender and character gender. An audience watching the plays today is working within a very different convention and is required to read the plays in a different way. I investigate below (Chapter 8) the ways in which an audience reads gender representation on stage today.

Stallybrass, from a late twentieth century viewpoint argues, to me unconvincingly, that Shakespeare's audience would have had a voyeuristic interest in the mechanics of the representation of the female body on stage and speculates that the young actors may have used prosthetics (false breasts) to achieve a convincing representation, that, 'the demand that the audience *sees* is at its most intense in the undressing of the boy actor.' (Stallybrass, p.64) But such an argument fails to understand what convention allowed an audience to see and an actor to show; fails to understand the nature of an



Elizabethan mono-gender actor convention or the requirements of any actor (as will be shown later) in the creation of gender and character on stage.<sup>2</sup> Stallybrass's interpretation of the playing of women by men on the Elizabethan stage as a voyeuristic and fetishistic activity would have been without meaning to the Elizabethan audience. Indeed an audience would not even have thought of themselves as *watching* a play at all. An Elizabethan audience went to *hear* a play. It was to be another century before anyone wrote of watching a play.

Clifford Williams, director of the 1967 National Theatre revival of As You Like It is right in arguing that it would be impossible to stage the plays today as they were staged originally because a late twentieth century audience, post Platonic, post-Foucaultian, would be unable *not* to interpret a performance in such a way. A contemporary audience would be unable, viewing such a production through the dominant theatrical and social conventions of our time, to interpret such a performance as other than homosexual, even, Williams argues, paedophilic. The prosthetic breasts that Stallybrass imagines to have been used on an Elizabethan stage would add fetishism to paedophilia.

The audience at Shakespeare's Globe would have seen a variety of male

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<sup>2</sup> Olivier instigated a discussion of this very issue after watching rehearsals of the all-male As You Like It, see below Chapter 3.

actors of all ages playing a variety of female roles and not have thought of these as being *male* actors, merely as actors - there were no other type. Helms talks of the 'androcentric playhouse' which she describes as 'the originating context for his [Shakespeare's] representation of gender.' (Helms, p.197)

While Helms may be right in describing Shakespeare's *stage* as androcentric his playhouse was not for, if restrictions applied on who could tread the boards of the Elizabethan stage, no such restrictions applied to the audience. There were no social conventions to limit who could watch, or listen to, a play, though there were social conventions and economic factors which, then as now, governed where in the playhouse the play could be watched from. As Orgel argues:

'The theatre was a place of unusual freedom for women of the period; foreign visitors comment on the fact that English women go to the theatre unescorted and unmasked, and a large proportion of the audience consisted of women. The puzzle here would be why a culture that so severely regulated the lives of women in every other sphere, suspended its restriction in the case of theater. The fact of the large female audience must have had important consequences for the development of English popular drama. It meant the success of a play was significantly dependent upon the receptiveness of women; and this in turn meant that theatrical representations, whether of women or men or anything else, also depended for their success to a significant degree on the receptiveness of women.' (Orgel, p.8)

In a photographic project at the Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst in Berlin in 1977, the German artist Marianne Wex brought together some 6,000 photographs of body postures taken between 1974 and 1977 to demonstrate her thesis that body language is a result of sex-based, patriarchal socialization,



affecting all 'feminine' and 'masculine' role behaviour. She brought the photographs together in a book in 1979 and included photographs of sculptures from the past 4,000 years concluding that, 'the body forms of the two sexes were never so different in any time or land as they are today.' (Wex, p.284) The difference in Elizabethan times was much less marked, Foucault's gender neutrality. If Wex is correct then the challenge for the actor in representing gender on the stage today is more important than it has been before and would have been less of a challenge for his or her Elizabethan equivalent. Wex also make the observation that, 'those postures typical for women, were also present in men, but they were young boys, or very old or obviously underprivileged men. That is to say: the body postures of socially weak males is similar to the general posture of females.' (Wex, p.8) Taking Wex's observations together we can see that for a young male actor in a world where gender postures were less marked than they are today the task of playing a woman on stage was not as difficult as it might be today and Helms' 'androcentric' stage may have been one of 'androgynous' posture. In summary, Shakespeare wrote his plays for a multi-gender audience and single-gender actors working within a long established and unchallenged convention of men representing women on stage, the audience listening to a play and

not watching it.<sup>3</sup>

With the outbreak of the Civil War in England in 1642, and the theatres being identified with the Stuart cause, all the public playhouses were closed. For the 18 years of the Puritan Interregnum there were no public performances of plays. Those actors who attempted such performances were fined or jailed; others continued to keep the drama alive and themselves in occupation by giving performances in private houses; William Davenant found a way around the ban by his concoctions of ‘music and instruction’ the first of which The Siege of Rhodes performed in 1656 is regarded by some as the first English opera. With the Restoration of the Monarchy under Charles II in 1660, the theatres were once again reopened and it was Davenant, with his colleague Thomas Killigrew, who obtained the Royal Patent that allowed public performances once more when he opened Lincoln’s Inn Field’s Theatre as The Duke’s House with a company led by Thomas Betterton.

For 18 years the public theatres of London had stood empty. They were now replaced by a new generation of theatres - indoors, with for the first time proscenium arches behind the apron stages, and also for the first time with

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<sup>3</sup> A comparable convention still exists on British radio where the parts of children, boys as well as girls, are played by adult female actors. It has been the accepted convention since radio broadcasts began and is governed by the laws and social conventions that severely limit the number of hours that real children can work as performers.



female actors on those stages. Davenant's patent specifically allowed for the ending of the practice 'whereby the women's parts have hitherto been made by men.' (quoted in Thomas, p.17) On 8th December 1660 an actress, whose name we do not know, stepped onto an English public stage for the first time. She played Desdemona in a production of Othello by Thomas Killigrew's King's Company. The poet Thomas Jordan wrote a prologue to the event, 'to introduce the first woman that came to act on the stage in the tragedy called the Moor of Venice.':

'The Woman playes today, mistake me not,  
No Man in Gown, or Page in Pety-Coat.' (Thomas Jordan, quoted

Howe, p.19)

Confirmation from Jordan that grown men as well as boys (pages) played women on the pre-Restoration stage.

We know from Gosson that the tradition in continental Europe was different to the English one. With the Restoration the English stage now followed the conventions - and the fashions - of the continent. As Andrew Newport confirms in a letter to Sir Richard Leveson on 15th December 1669: '...upon our stages we have women actors, as beyond seas.' (quoted Wilson, p.3)

The most famous and most comprehensive chronicler of Restoration London was Samuel Pepys. He saw The Beggar's Bush by The King's Company on 3rd January 1661 and recorded in his diary that this was, '...the first time that

ever I saw Women come upon the stage.’ (Pepys, p.5) Interestingly Pepys saw a man playing a woman a few days later. On 7th January 1661 he saw the actor Edward Kynaston as Epicoene in Ben Jonson’s The Silent Woman (a play from 1609). The character of Epicoene has to masquerade as a woman for the purpose of the plot, ‘..the boy hath the good turn to appear in three shapes: 1, as a poor woman in ordinary clothes to please Morose; then in fine clothes as a galant, and in them was clearly the prettiest woman in the whole house- and lastly as a man.’ (Ibid. p.7) What is interesting is that when the play had last been performed, before the interregnum, the actor playing Epicoene would have been disguised as a woman in a production in which the female characters would themselves have been played by men or boys - a convention that the 27 year old Pepys (born in 1633) would have been scarcely old enough to remember.<sup>4</sup> Kynaston’s date of birth is unknown but assumed to have been around 1650 (Marion Jones in Craik, p.120) This would have made him about 11 when Pepys saw him in Epicoene. He went on to be one of the leading male actors of the restoration stage. Kynaston is known to have played female as well as male roles, confirmation that there was a short period - only a matter of months - of overlap when both conventions of gender

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<sup>4</sup> The Marathi male actors in India who played female parts were called ‘singing boys’. One, Bal Ghandharv, dominated the Marathi stage in Bombay from 1911 to as late as 1940 when he would hardly still have been what we would call a boy. Freddie Mercury, the lead singer of Queen, grew up in Bombay (as Farukh Baragar) and brought some of that Marathi performance tradition to his appearances as a rock singer.



representation found a place on the London stage.<sup>5</sup>

In less than twenty years the English theatre had been transformed out of all recognition. Gone were the large theatres on Bankside open to the elements and with no scenery and a reliance on the androgynous costume of the day. England had suffered a Civil War. A republic had replaced the monarchy, the monarchy had in turn replaced the Republic. In the eighteen years during which the theatres were closed, the society of which they were a part too had changed beyond all recognition. When the theatres were reopened they, like society, had reinvented themselves. In his play In Good King Charles' Golden Days, written in 1939, Shaw imagines a conversation between King Charles II and the housekeeper to Sir Isaac Newton, Mrs Basham, in which it is possible to hear an echo of what may have been the views of the time:

I do not disapprove of the playhouse, sir. My grandfather, who is still alive and hearty, was befriended in his youth by Mr William Shakespear, a wellknown player and writer of comedies, tragedies, and the like. Mr Shakespear would have died of shame to see a woman on the stage. It is unnatural and wrong. Only the most abandoned females would do such a thing..... They are not like women at all. They are just like what they are; and they spoil the play for anyone who can remember the old actors in the women's parts. They could make you believe you were listening to real women.' (Shaw, p. 23)

Gone a theatre that was, as Gibson argues, largely aural. In its place a theatre

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<sup>5</sup> Jonson's play was revived in 1977, at the Tristan Bates Theatre in London, with an all-male cast as its selling point, directed by Sam Shammass, a female director with a suitably androgynous name.

of illusion; of artificial light on an indoor stage; of elaborate scenery constantly changing behind a proscenium arch; of prose instead of blank verse; of obvious costume distinction between the male characters and the female; and of women on stage where before there had been only men. It was a theatre of artifice and illusion that was to survive unchallenged for three hundred years until the next theatrical revolution of the 1960s when the English Stage Company strongly influenced by Bertolt Brecht's 'epic' productions of Shakespeare would create a climate that, as we shall see, allowed men once more to wear frocks on stage.

The exception to this rule was, of course, pantomime where there was cross-dressing in both directions. The 'Principal Boy' was played by a girl and the 'Dame' by a man. In neither case does the actor make any attempt to disguise their true gender but rather uses the cross-dressing to emphasis/reinforce rather than disguise their gender. Pantomime has its origins in Italian *commedia dell'arte* which flourished whilst Shakespeare was writing and performing in England. The first *commedia dell'arte* company is mentioned in Paris in 1570 and Molière shared a theatre with them from 1658 by which time the tradition was in decline. The form never caught on in England and the character of Harlequin was not seen in London until 1720 when John Weaver introduced him with his 'Italian Night Scenes'. This was 80 years after the closure of the theatres in England but it is not too fanciful to imagine that the actors of the Harlequinades and the Dames of the



pantomimes that developed from them were an atavistic survival from performance traditions of Shakespeare's day and before. A line through Mrs. Noye in the Wakefield Mystery Play written in 1450, documented performances in 1554 and 1556, through Juliet's Nurse, first published in 1597, to Dame Durden (or Jack's Mother) show a constant thread of convention and characterisation unique to the English stage.

With these new theatres, playing to new audiences in a new society, came new conventions. The boy actors had grown up and just as the professional male actor had appeared a generation before, in 1660 appeared the first professional female actors.<sup>6</sup> The new convention, the ruling convention and soon the only *lawful* convention, was that women were represented on stage by female actors - by actresses. Just as an Elizabethan audience had found it impossible to imagine a female actor representing a woman on stage (had no word for a female actor), so just thirty years later a restoration audience found it difficult to imagine how male actors had represented women on stage. One ruling convention had completely supplanted another.

That the previous generation had been satisfied with men playing women on stage was something that the new generation found foreign and difficult to

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<sup>6</sup> The word actress is first used in 1626, of Queen Henrietta Maria's first court performance in a French pastoral. There were women on stage in the 1630s but only in the privacy of court.

understand, even incomprehensible, ‘The Characters of Women, on former Theatres, were perform’d by Boys, or young men of the most effeminate Aspect. And what Grace, or Master Strokes of Action can we conceive such ungain Hoydens to have been capable of?’ ( Cibber, p.55) Why actresses? Why had the convention changed? Howe argues that, ‘It was certainly not the case, as some have assumed, of women being automatically superior to boys in the performance of female roles.’ (Howe, p.19) Rather it was a change of theatrical convention to mirror changes in social convention. The ‘boy’ players had gone and it would be three hundred years before they were to return. In the pamphlet of 1643 The Actor’s Remonstrance the writer says, ‘Our boys, ere we shall have libertie to act againe, will be grown out of use like crackt organ pipes, and have faces as old as our flags.’ (quoted Gilder, p.137)

The change from male actors playing women to female actors playing women was swift, a matter of months. There must have been ‘boy’ players still in 1660. How else to account for some of Pepys’ comparative comments on the skills of actresses? Of Killigrew’s production of The Scornful Lady on 12th February 1661 he writes that ‘now done by a woman [this] makes the play appear much better than ever it did to me’. (Pepys, p.35) He must have seen the part done before by a male actor and after the interregnum. He was too young to remember having seen it before the interregnum.



Killigrew and Davenant received their patent to reopen a theatre around 21st August 1660, and we know of six actresses in Davenant's company in 1660 by the names on a list of the actors drawn up by the prompter John Downes. Perhaps when the theatres reopened there were some actors available for work who had previously played female roles. around. Perhaps new 'boy' actors were trained up only to be overtaken in a matter of months by taste, fashion and the subject matter and sexual sophistication of the new plays being written and the female characters in those plays. Perhaps there were a handful of actors like Kynaston who could play both male and female roles. Whoever the male actors were who were still playing female parts, the audience could not accept them. The new audiences were only able to see the old convention through the intervention of the new convention and as a result found it impossible to accept what had now become, during the period of the theatres being reopened, a short lived alternative convention. The last male actor to play a female part on stage took his bow before 25th April 1662 when a Royal patent forbade the practice:

'And for as much as many plays formerly acted do contain several profane, obscene and scurrilous passages, and the women's parts herein have been acted by men in the habit of women, at which some have taken offence, for the preventing of these abuses for the future, we do hereby strictly command and enjoin that from henceforth...we do...permit and give leave that all the women's parts be acted in either of the said companies for the time to come may be performed by women, so long as their recreations, which by reason of the abuses aforesaid were scandalous and offensive, may by such reformation be esteemed not only harmless delight, but useful and instructive representations of human life.' (quoted Thomas, pps 17 - 18)



In eighteen months, from the re-opening of the theatres in October 1660 to this decree of April 1662 the representation of women on the English stage was changed beyond recognition. It was now not merely convention that kept men from appearing as women on stage, nor public taste, but the law.<sup>7</sup>

With the Licensing Act of 1737 governmental control of what could be shown on stage and how it could be represented became absolute. The Lord Chamberlain issued licences for theatres which allowed them to produce plays and also issued licences for the plays themselves which had to be read and approved by his office prior to performance.<sup>8</sup> The authority of the Lord Chamberlain was absolute until 1968 coinciding with the return of male actors

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<sup>7</sup> Straub notes that in the 18th century, 'a growing capacity to perceive gender ambiguity and to find it troubling did not, however, result in the prohibiting of female theatrical cross-dressing, as it did in the limitation of the masculine version to travesty. The cross-dressed actress came into a fashion that lasted, not without changes, throughout the century. The to her 'obvious' reason Straub cites for female cross-dressing is a very different one from that which motivated the cross-dressing on Shakespeare's stage. It was not a matter of practicality but that, 'conventionally attractive female bodies sell tickets.' (Straub, p.142) Straub sees female cross-dressing on stage as the result of economic necessity in a time of fierce competition and the female cross-dresser as an obviously heterosexual object commodity - the principle of the principal boy.

<sup>8</sup> The powers of censorship were vested in the Lord Chamberlain as they had been before the interregnum. Findlater argues that before the Reformation, 'The Elizabethan censor, indeed, was regarded not so much as an enemy of the theatre but rather as its ally. It was to the Master of the Revels, the Lord Chamberlain, the other noble patrons of acting companies, and the Queen herself that Shakespeare and his contemporaries looked for protection from the growing Puritanism of the middle class, expressed in the crusading hostility of local authorities, most of all in London.' (Findlater, p.21)



in women's roles on the English stage. It was to be three hundred years from 1662 until 1967 before social conventions changed radically enough to allow for a change in theatrical convention.

In the next chapter I shall look at the production that broke the intervening three hundred years of theatrical convention and show why men returned as women in a play by Shakespeare on the London stage.

### CHAPTER 3

In this chapter I look at the revival of As You Like It at the National Theatre in London in 1967 showing how changing social and theatrical conventions allowed the return of male actors playing female roles on the British<sup>1</sup> stage. A brief history of the play in performance prior to 1967 is given followed by a background to the National Theatre production, analysis of the influence of the theories of Jan Kott on the production, an examination of the rehearsal process and analysis of public and critical response to the production. I will show how changes in society, changes in the theatre, and academic theory all came together to create an environment which allowed the production to take place. I will show how the production illuminates audience reaction to the conventions of the representation of gender on stage and how the production became a part of the creation of a whole set of alternative ways of making theatre in Britain and the opening up of new stage conventions as anti-, counter-, and alternative conventions to the dominant ones.

#### PRODUCTION HISTORY 1599 - 1967

As You Like It was not one of the plays of Shakespeare to be performed after the Restoration. The play was written in 1599 for the newly opened Globe

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<sup>1</sup> I now write of the British rather than the English stage for obvious reasons of history. As will be seen below, theatre in Scotland becomes as important to the history of the conventions of gender representation as theatre in England.



Theatre and, perhaps, revived (according to tradition) in 1603 and played before James I. There is nothing known of it from then until 1723 when a version of the text was given by Charles Johnson at Drury Lane, and then at the same theatre, in a version much closer to Shakespeare's original, in 1740 with music by Thomas Arne. Popular in the 18th Century, 'largely because it offered parts for a succession of gifted and charming actresses'. ( Latham, p. lxxxvii ) The performing history of the play from its revival through to the second half of the 20th Century is largely one of the actresses who have played in it as Celia and Rosalind. Latham says, 'Rosalind remains one of the best Shakespearian parts available to an actress.' (Ibid p.lxxxix)

The major British productions immediately prior to the all-male revival at The National Theatre in 1967 were Glen Byam Shaw's at Stratford in 1957 with Peggy Ashcroft as Rosalind and Michael Elliot's for the National Shakespeare Company in 1961 with Vanessa Redgrave as Rosalind (revived at The Aldwych the following year). 'Miss Redgrave was no carefree, confident Rosalind, stage-managing affairs in the forest, but a waif who unsealed springs of pathos in the part, her gaiety and courage the more admirable because a little tremulous. It was a reading perhaps akin to the one Mrs Siddons [in 1785 and 1786] was not permitted to establish, and very touching.' (Ibid p.xc)

The National Theatre production was not the only one in 1967. There was

another production at Stratford directed by David Jones with Dorothy Tutin as ‘a tomboy Rosalind’ (Ibid p. xc) and Janet Suzman as Celia. All these productions, from the play’s revival in 1723 to Stratford in 1967 had been cast with male actors as the male characters and female actors as the female characters. The only exceptions to this performance practice were school productions (Laurence Olivier played Viola in a school production, see below), University productions (see Robertson below on the Marlow Society productions) and a single performance of the play given with an all-male cast on Shakespeare’s birthday, 24th April 1920, at the Central YMCA Building in London by ‘the men members of the Ben Greet Players, assisted by a few friends.’ (The Stage Newspaper, April 29th 1920).<sup>2</sup> The uniqueness of this performance and the reaction to it are recorded only in the pages of The Stage, the London newspaper of the entertainment business. There had been condemnation of the performance even before it was seen. ‘Pillicoddy’, a columnist for The Stage had written:

‘In Heaven’s name, why? Can one imagine for a moment a male Rosalind?...We know, of course, it was played by males before the advent of women on stage, but “freak” performances may be carried too far...if this sort of conceit is imitated, we shall develop a race of effeminate noodles that will disgust playgoers with the stage...and drive them to look elsewhere for clean and wholesome amusement.’

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<sup>2</sup> There was a singular exception to this. From 1927 until 1963, the Osiris Repertory Company toured Britain and Ireland giving fit-up performances of Shakespeare in schools and halls. Under its Artistic Director Miss Nancy Hewins and operating out of the village of Willersly in Worcestershire, the company only employed female actors who took on all the roles. The company was also, I was told by an actor who had toured with them, a lesbian company, and this fifty years before Gay Sweatshop.



(The Stage, 15th April 1920)

Greet replied: 'I give an all-men show for the mere joy of the thing. Thank goodness my fellow actors are enjoying the joke, and I think some of the public will.' (The Stage, 22nd April 1920) The Stage's anonymous reviewer the following week described the performance, 'The men playing women reverted in dress also to Elizabethan precedents. Neither in attire nor in tones was there the slightest cause for offence.' The critic reassured his readers that there was nothing 'unpleasantly namby-pamby or [any] finicking effeminacy about the production.' (The Stage, 29th April 1920) The reaction to the production, has strong echoes of Restoration comments about men playing women. Pillicoddy's 'effeminate noodles' could be Colly Cibber's 'ungain Hoydens'. The expectation of the audience in 1920 was of something as 'scandalous and offensive' as that described in the Royal Patent of 1662. It is clear that the convention which had taken hold in 1660 and been backed by law in 1662 was not open to challenge even in 1920, despite the reassuring words of The Stage's critic. It would be another half century before a similar breach of convention was tried again.

## THE BACKGROUND TO THE NATIONAL THEATRE PRODUCTION

The National Theatre Company, under the Directorship of Laurence Olivier found its first, temporary, home in The Old Vic in 1962. Kenneth Tynan joined the National as Literary Manager in 1963, giving up his post as theatre

critic of The Observer having written to Olivier as soon as Olivier was appointed to the nascent company suggesting himself for the role.

‘...Ken settled on the title of Literary Manager (borrowed from Archer and Granville Barker) rather than the German ‘dramaturg’. He would be house critic and chooser of plays, a job invented by the playwright and critic Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in 1867, when a group of Hamburg businessmen first tried to start a national theatre. Throughout 1963 Ken and Olivier discussed everything from casting to the logo of the theatre’s writing paper.’  
(Kathleen Tynan, p.217)

Tynan ‘courted controversy’ (Clifford Williams, interview with this writer). It was perhaps this, thinks Williams, that lay behind his decision to stage an all male production of As You Like It by the National Theatre Company. The production had a difficult genesis and Clifford Williams who eventually directed it, was not Tynan or Olivier’s first choice. Tynan compiled the programme for the production and its contents clearly indicate the different and sometimes contradictory strands of thought behind the production. The programme contained three short essays: The Drag Tradition: Some notes and comments on the Elizabethan convention whereby female roles were played by boys (written by Tynan himself); production notes by Clifford Williams and extracts from an essay entitled Shakespeare’s Bitter Arcadia by the Polish scholar and critic Jan Kott.

## THE INFLUENCE OF JAN KOTT

Kott was a fashionable figure at the time. His book Shakespeare our



Contemporary was first published in Britain in 1965. A second, revised edition was published in 1967 and included the essay on As You Like It. Kott's connection with the English theatre started, according to Peter Brook, 'in a night club in Warsaw' (Kott, p. ix (Peter Brook's introduction) ) in June 1957 when the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company's production of Titus Andronicus, directed by Brook, was playing in Warsaw. 'Titus Andronicus has revealed to me a Shakespeare I dreamed of but have never before seen on the stage. I count this performance among the five greatest theatrical experiences of my life.' (Kott, op. cit p.288) Tynan had a rather different view of this production. In The Observer he described Olivier's performance in the lead as 'a versified atrocity report.' (The Observer 7th July 1957) If that English production had a profound affect on Kott, he was to return the compliment. After the English publication of Shakespeare our Contemporary Kott soon became one of the most important influences on the production of Shakespeare's plays in England in the 1960s.<sup>3</sup>

Kott's influence was such that he was mentioned in most of the reviews of the

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<sup>3</sup> Another key influence was John Barton who, working at Stratford, widely influenced the speaking of Shakespeare's verse. According to Williams, "we were all under his spell" and Barton's approach to the plays through the speaking of the verse will be seen to have a greater influence on the rehearsal process than Kott's theories did on the critical response.

play when it first opened: ‘Kott, I can prophesy, is going to cause a lot more trouble in Shakespeare production before somebody else arrives to discipline him.’ (Illustrated London News (anonymous critic) 14th October 1967); ‘Inspiration for this view of the play is derived - like much of the current attitude to Shakespeare - from the writings of Jan Kott, Polish critic and commentator of whom Peter Brook has said quite simply: “Kott is an Elizabethan.”’ (Roger Baker, London Life, 7th October 1967); ‘Like most of Kott’s arguments, it’s overstated and based more on imaginative analogy than textual evidence.’ (Ronald Bryden, The Observer (Tynan’s old paper) 8th October 1967<sup>4</sup>); ‘The persuasive and popular professor.’ (Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 8th October 1967)

If Kott’s influence on the production was assumed at the time to have been considerable, even crucial, Williams is careful in both the programme note, press interviews at the time and in talking to this writer thirty years later, to make clear that he was not following Kott’s theories in his production (though Tynan may have been in deciding on the central casting ‘concept’). Hobson was one of the few critics perceptive enough to notice this, saying, ‘Mr. Williams has in fact put Kott firmly back into the cradle.’ (The Sunday Times, 8th October 1967) Philip Hope-Wallace in The Guardian noted that: ‘The

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<sup>4</sup> Bryden himself, went on to become the Literary Manager of the RSC.



National Theatre's curious production...anticipates by ten days the publication of Professor Kott's essay (Bitter Arcadia) which is included for the first time in the second edition of Shakespeare Our Contemporary.' (Philip Hope-Wallace, The Guardian, 4th October 1967) It was an edited version of this essay that was included in the programme to the production. But the genesis of the production precedes the publication of the essay by more than a year to some time in 1966 when it was first decided that the National Theatre would mount an all-male As You Like It. None of the reviews mention the one person who was more instrumental in its genesis than anyone else - Kenneth Tynan, the National Theatre's Literary Manager and Olivier's intellectual right-hand man.

What the reviews do show (and I shall return to them after looking at the pre-production and rehearsal process) is that there was a distinct tension between the theories propounded by Kott with their roots in the nature of Elizabethan production practices and attitudes to sexuality, androgyny and sexual ambiguities on the one hand, and on the other hand the English counter-tradition of the drag performer, of camp and of the pantomime dame (polarities indicated in Tynan's compilation of the programme to the production). A third tension came from the simple practicalities of mounting the production with the given cast of male actors.

The only mention of the production in Kenneth Tynan's letters is a reference

to his seeking photographs for the programme and it is clear from his contributions to the programme, The Drag Tradition and A Drag Portfolio, that it is the pantomimic principle boy tradition rather than a concern with Elizabethan performance practice or the revelation of truth through gender casting that attracted Tynan to the project. Perhaps Kott's ideas were used, a year after commitment to the production as a post-rationalisation of Tynan's concept.

Kott met with Williams, at Tynan's invitation, during rehearsals. But Williams himself was keen to stress his hope that '... it will not be assumed that I have tried to follow his precept...the production is not designed to demonstrate specific ideas advanced by that essay (Bitter Arcadia).' (Williams, programme to National Theatre production) Kott argues that '(gender/sexual) ambiguity in Shakespeare is at the same time a poetic and an erotic principle,' that 'the universality of desire cannot be contained in or limited to one sex.' Kott traces his ideas back to Plato and finds in Shakespeare's Sonnets and in the Comedies Two Gentlemen of Verona, Love's Labours Lost, As You Like It and Twelfth Night that the 'real theme' is 'the choice, or rather the impossibility of choice, between the youth and the woman, the fragile boundary between friendship and love....' (Kott, p. 196)

Kott takes the Sonnets as the starting point for his arguments about gender in the plays, 'There are three characters: a man, a youth and a woman. This trio



exhaust every form of love and go through all its stages. They exhaust all the variants and forms of faithlessness, every kind of relationship, including love, friendship, jealousy. They go through the heaven and hell of love.’ (Kott, p.191) Part of Shakespeare’s purpose in writing the Sonnets, argues Kott, is, ‘to save the boy’s effeminate beauty from oblivion.’ (Kott, p.195)

Sonnet xx:

“A woman’s face, with Nature’s own hand-painted,

Hast thou, the *master-mistress* of my passion.”

Kott takes this also to be the theme of the early comedies including As You Like It. ‘Shakespeare was well aware of the limitations of the boy players. They could play girls; with some difficulty they could play old women. But how could a boy act a mature woman? In all Shakespeare’s plays...there are very few such parts. Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra are sexually mature. These parts, however, are curtailed to suit a boy actor’s scope. This is a fact known to all actresses who have played Cleopatra or Lady Macbeth. There is little substance in those parts, as if whole pages have been torn out of them. Between Macbeth and his wife matters of sex are never clearly explained. Either the conjugal bed was burnt-out land for them, or in this marriage the woman had the role of the man.’ (Kott, p.208)

But is this true? Kott’s friend Brook did not think so. Williams remembers Peter Brook telling him, when he came to see the production of As You Like

It, that he had always wanted to direct a male Cleopatra, feeling that he had never seen the last act work because the woman playing Cleopatra 'was always too tired' . (Williams, interview with this writer) What of the sexuality of Lady Macbeth's 'Unsex me here' speech? Is not the play the tragic/dark side of the boy/woman acting convention? The woman/boy wanting to be a man. For the boy/actor such a transition is not only possible but inevitable. For the woman/character it is an impossibility. In my production of the play for the SOHO group with an all female cast we found a strong sexual frisson. There was no question of the sexual life of the couple being 'burnt-out land', though perhaps Lady Macbeth was sexually dominant. Could this have been shown by a boy actor? Or if shown today would the boy/woman/predator be offensive, politically unacceptable? All these ideas are explored later through the workshops with actors and the experiments with actors and audiences.

Kott goes on to argue that 'the most dangerous disguise of all is the one where sex is changed. Transvestism has two directions: sacral and sexual; liturgical and orgiastic.... It is the realization of man's eternal dream of overcoming the boundaries of his own body and his own sex....It was also a dream of love free from all limitations of sex; of love pervading the bodies of boys and girls, men and women, in the way light penetrates through glass.' (Kott, p.221) For Kott the use of disguise in the plays (Julia in Two Gentlemen, Rosalind in As You Like It and Viola in Twelfth Night all dressing as boys) 'has its own eroticism



and metaphysics.’ (Kott, p.213) In each of these plays where a female character disguises herself as a ‘boy’: “Her charm is irresistible. She seduces all men and women alike: the former as a girl, the latter as a boy. She is an almost perfect androgyny.’ (Kott, p. 206) <sup>5</sup>

For Kott, As You Like It and Twelfth Night only work if the original casting convention of Shakespeare’s stage is adopted. ‘In the love scenes in the Forest of Arden, just as in Illyria, the theatrical form and the theme completely correspond with and penetrate each other, on condition, that is, that female parts are played, as they were on the Elizabethan stage, by boys. An actor disguised as a girl plays a girl disguised as a boy. Everything is real and unreal, false and genuine at the same time. And we cannot tell on which side of the looking-glass we have found ourselves. As if everything were mere reflection.’ (Kott, p.219) This theory, or rather assertion, of Kott’s, is one that will be investigated later in this thesis in the practical workshops. Williams, while acknowledging that ‘all Kott’s writing is refreshing and stimulating’ was quick to dissociate himself from the ideas that Kott promulgates in the programme and which were behind Tynan’s original idea for the production: ‘...virtuoso mimicry cannot be the aim of adult actors who are neither eunuchs

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<sup>5</sup> Kott links this sexual ambiguity to a Renaissance tradition that includes the ‘narrow hips, high waists and small breasts’ of Botticelli’s nymphs and the ‘Davids’ of Donatello, Verrochio and Michelangelo. An echo here of Wex.

nor androgynes. Prosody before pelvises.’ (Williams, Programme to National Theatre production)

Kott ends his essay, though, not by stressing the importance of transvestism, which is a part of the drag tradition, but of androgyny which is part of a Platonic tradition: ‘Rosalind is an almost perfect androgyny and personifies the same longing for the lost Paradise where there had as yet been no division into the male and female elements.’ (Kott p.236) Does the text of As You Like It justify Kott’s reading or is it, as John Barber said in his review of the production, ‘Like most of Kott’s arguments... overstated and based more on imaginative analogy than textual evidence’? The importance of Kott is not only that he fed Tynan theories which gave a post-rationalisation to his idea to mount the production of As You Like It, but that the wide currency of his ideas through the publication of Shakespeare Our Contemporary gave an academic and critical context for the production when it opened. Kott suggested that the original convention of gender representation for which the play was written was not only one that would be acceptable in the 1960s but that it was an essential convention if an audience was to fully understand the play in performance. From the dispassionate viewpoint that Warsaw gave him, Kott could look at British stage conventions as an outsider. What he could not take into account was the sheer strength and dominance of the current stage convention which had precluded such a production for three hundred years.



## PRE-PRODUCTION

The artistic team at the National was Olivier, John Dexter, William Gaskill and Tynan. 'If two of them were for a play, one neutral and himself (Olivier) against, he would bow to the majority and not impose a veto.' (Kathleen Tynan, p.220). Williams recalled that, 'Sometime in 1966 John Dexter was going to do the production.... Dexter had a falling out with Olivier and departed unexpectedly....Dexter was very influenced by the Kott book. Olivier then asked me if I would take over the production (I think probably he asked me because Ken Tynan had mentioned my name to him).' (Williams, interview with the writer)

Williams met with Olivier who showed him the model box for the set that had already been designed for the production. Williams told him:

'that if I was going to do the show at all, I would have to start from scratch...I was unaware of what Kott had written, though I intended to look it up....So Olivier said, "okay, who do you want to do [design] it?" and I said, "Ralph Koltai". I spoke with Ralph and...we could really find in our hearts no reason for doing it with an all-male cast. And I told Olivier, I can't see the point of doing this and he said, 'Well reflect about it.'...Ralph and I spoke a bit more because we were flattered to be asked to do something at the National but couldn't come up with an answer that made sense to us. We were on the track of trying to find some straightforward practical reason it was being done by men. Of course we were aware of the boy player situation but these were fully grown men so it was not at all analogous to a Shakespearian production.... We came up with an idea that took place in a Japanese prisoner of war camp with searchlights and barbed wire all of which became terribly fashionable years after. We thought it absolutely puerile when we reflected upon it. For a moment Ralph and I were excited because...a group of men, incarcerated, wishing to do a play about their yearnings...as a scenario sort of made sense, but on inspection seemed to us to just creak. And the long and the short of it

was we didn't come up with a solution.' (Williams, interview)

These discussions were in late 1966. In early 1967 Williams went off to direct a play in Helsinki and it was there that Olivier 'phoned him to ask when he was going to go into rehearsal. Williams told him, 'Look I can't. It doesn't make sense at all.' (Williams, interview) Olivier once again asked him to reflect on it. On his return to London, Williams met up with Koltai and told him that if they did not do the production they would never work at the National again. He told him: "We'd better find a reason for doing it," and he said, "Well, maybe we'll find out the reason just by doing it. Let's do the bloody thing." There was no conscious or methodical...it was just taking a job which we couldn't see how to do but we'd better do it.' (Williams, interview)

Having made the decision to go ahead with the production, all involved got on with their jobs. The actors were for the most part cast out of the necessity of the small company's repertory system and Williams had no choice in his cast. As with any National Theatre production at the time, there was little or no choice in the casting - there was a small company of actors all of whom had to be kept constantly busy and with a repertory system in operation the availability of actors for one production was dependent upon their casting in others.

Williams remembers its being 'a company largely of men' and does not



‘remember any debate about the morality of the situation from a feminist point of view.’ (Williams, interview) There was no questioning of the taking away from female actors the opportunity of playing what Latham calls ‘one of the best Shakespearian parts available to an actress.’ (Latham, p.xxxix) ‘The girls in the company were very supportive.’ (Williams, interview)<sup>6</sup>

Ronald Pickup played Rosalind agreeing, ‘because he’d probably never be asked to play Rosalind again.’; Charles Kay played Celia, ‘he thought, well, here’s a chance to camp and not be criticised for doing it.’; and Anthony Hopkins, Audrey. ‘After a little while Tony Hopkins was in great distress..and said to me, “Look here, I find this really embarrassing...prancing about..” and we replaced him,.’ (all from Williams interview)

For all involved in the production there were no established rules as to how to use the revived convention. Like Shakespeare’s actors they had no experience

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<sup>6</sup> By 1997 the sexual politics of gender casting had changed and the casting of female actors in male roles was seen by some to be a way of redressing the relative paucity of female parts. One director, Helen Alexander, argued in favour not of cross-casting but of what she termed re-gendering, that is changing the gender of the character in order to accomodate the gender of the actor. Writing in the Equity Journal she said: ‘Current conventions now accept the ‘authenticity’ of a black Banquo or an Asian Oedipus. Isn’t it time that audiences were challenged to accept the ‘authenticity’ of a Queen Lear or a female Doctor Faustus?... Some plays even lend themselves to 100 per cent regendering.’ Alexander’s motive is: ‘Significantly improving the number and variety of roles available to women.... a truly representative 50/50 ratio by the millenium! ( Caught in the Authenticity Trap, Equity Journal, June 1997.

of working in any convention except the dominant one of their time. Unlike Shakespeare's actors they did have knowledge of the 'new' convention they were being asked to use, but they had to discover from scratch how a male actor plays a female character on stage.

### PLAYING WOMEN AND THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

'I think that all that happened during the course of rehearsals is that we just decided to get on with the play and do it. We happened to have a group of men and we resisted any idea of doing it in a drag fashion.' Drag, Williams felt, was what Tynan had wanted, hence his decision to compile an article and photographs of the drag tradition for the programme. Before the play opened 'it was seen as actors in drag rather than some political, socially responsible cross-casting.' The decision was taken not to play it in 'any sort of extrovert sense of sexual mimicry.' (Williams) The decision not to use false breasts and go down the road of the drag tradition was one that Williams feels was helped by the contemporary 'Carnaby Street' look of the costumes within a design that created, 'a strange other place in which anything could happen.' (Williams). Tynan had originally tried to achieve a contemporary sound to the production as well: '(Tynan) tried to persuade Paul McCartney to write the music for an all-male production, at the National, of As You Like It. McCartney turned him down because he did not "really like words by Shakespeare".' (Kathleen Tynan, p. 256)



Olivier was expecting something very different. ‘After one exhausting Sunday rehearsal, Olivier appeared to give notes. Olivier said he had no criticisms except Ronnie Pickup’s dress. I said, “What’s wrong with that?” He said, “It wants padding.” And I said to Olivier, I remember this very clearly, that the whole point of the show is not to have padding. And he said, “Oh, all right.” And later Olivier sent me a picture of himself playing Viola as school with padding.’ (Williams).

Olivier is the only theatre practitioner I have come across in my research who (like Stallybrass above) suggests the use of prosthetics in the creation of a female character. The fact that this was raised as a means of using the revived convention at the very beginning of the attempt at revival and dropped immediately is an important confirmation of what is found in the workshops below - that creating a character of whatever gender is about the actor using the body they have. None of the other productions discussed below ever considered the use of prosthetics.

So was it, I asked Williams, that in rehearsal, as with any play, that the actors just accepted they were playing women? ‘Absolutely. Absolutely. That side of it was settled by Pickup....Just straight through with the verse, saying what had to be said. And that I think became the magnetic North of the guys who were playing girls....It caused no problem....Actors being actors, chaps like letting the female side of itself manifest itself. Once you go into rehearsal on any

play...you make it the best play you've ever done. You have to.' (Williams)

Williams describes the cast as 'relentlessly heterosexual' (Williams) - unlike John Dexter the director originally chosen for the production. When revived with a largely gay company, Williams felt the production was not as good.

What of reaction to the production outside of the rehearsal room? Williams was aware of 'a lot of misgiving and distress, particularly among the Board of the National Theatre,' but none of it reached as far as the rehearsal room, with Tynan taking the flak. 'And then it all went away because the show was a huge success....One expected to be perhaps taken to task by someone or other... "Why were we doing it?" I was satisfied now we'd done a decent job according to the prescription which was to do it with a handful of men as opposed to a handful of men and women. That was the rule of the day, okay, we did it. And I thought it was a good show in those terms. And my memory is that it was well received in those terms....I remember that the consensus of opinion was very, very good...it seemed to be a great success.' (Williams).<sup>7</sup> Tynan had perhaps been expecting a success de scandal, being deliberately provocative in his decision to mount the play with an all-male cast. 'Tynan would have enjoyed it had it been terribly controversial but just as much enjoyed its uncontroversial success' thinks Williams. (Williams)

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<sup>7</sup> So much so that the production toured Europe and was then revived for a long American tour two years later: 'An aborted thing...done under the banner of the National Theatre.' (Williams)



Williams compared his production with the others he had seen before it, most notably the 1961 production at Stratford with Vanessa Redgrave as Rosalind. These he describes as ‘unbelievable’, ‘very gushy’ and the Redgrave in particular as ‘animal like’. ‘It must have occurred to us during rehearsal that that was one thing we couldn’t do. We had to be very, in a sense pristine, very clean, very clear, very simple. And one was encouraged to be very simple, simply because one had to be very careful...It was a discipline...It kept us very, very attentive to the inner movement of the play.’ (Williams)

‘It’s always the last five minutes that matter with a play....A whole evening can be rescued in the last five minutes.’ (Williams) and Williams remembers Marc Wilkinson’s score and the final song as being a big factor in the success of the production, something that was also to be true of Prospect’s cross-cast Pericles six years later. Philip Hope-Wallace in his Guardian review wrote of the final music: ‘...ending with the relief of a male alto in the masque scene, a relief after so much gruff male speech....’ (The Guardian 4th October 1967), one of the few comments on the vocal range of the actors. We will return to this issue in discussing the Prospect Pericles where similar comments were made, and in analysing the reviews of the production.

Kenneth Pearson charted the genesis of the production in a lengthy article published in The Sunday Times, two days before the opening night. The piece is largely written in the form of a Notes Diary. This is how he chronicles the

production.

‘Anxious cable from his agent to Clifford Williams in Finland: “Is it true you are going to do the Bard in drag.”’ (Sunday Times 1.10.67) Pearson notes that there was talk of setting the production in a boys’ school. (ST 1.10.67) Although Williams remembers Olivier as having been very uninvolved with rehearsals (partly no doubt because of his failing health), Pearson notes that, ‘One evening Olivier appears from hospital in a blue suit and bedroom slippers. He discusses a model of the set with Williams and Koltai for two hours.’ Pearson also confirms their discussion of breasts and padding. After the first run through with set and costumes on the Old Vic stage, ‘Olivier takes Williams to a trattoria in Kensington, where he gives him a list of notes, most of which the director anticipates. Over supper, Olivier asks, “Shouldn’t the women be wearing breasts.” They talk much of breasts till two in the morning.’ (Sunday Times 1.10.67) Pearson notes a lack of confidence after that first run with set and costumes. The following day (the Monday of the final week of rehearsal) with some of the costumes being reworked by Koltai, Williams tells the cast: “You’ve got to find the play again.”’ (Sunday Times, 1.10.67) ‘Richard Kay comes on in an auburn wig. Pickup is wigless, his own hair brushed over his forehead. His appearance in general is different. Olivier has been in his dressing room making his face up. And suddenly it’s Twiggy. If Twiggy, looking like a boy, can capture the world’s attention, the argument seems to run, why can’t men look like Twiggy. At any rate the simple



transformation gives the company back its confidence. The performance is charged with an altogether higher voltage.’ (Sunday Times 1.10.67)

Here is a clear indication of the way in which the social milieu, the change in social convention, allowed the production to happen. Changing social conventions gave permission for changing theatrical conventions. This was what Melvin Lasky had in the previous year named *The Swinging Sixties* (Time, 16th April 1966) with London as ‘a newly vigorous, youthful, colourful and exciting place, no longer smug and drab but pulsing with bright innovation and sudden talent.’ (Brian, p.13)

The social and political changes brought about in 1967 were far reaching. Harold Wilson’s government had been elected in April 1966 (the month of Lasky’s article) with a majority of 97. In 1967 legislation brought in included the Criminal Justice Act which introduced minority verdicts and suspended sentences for first offenders; the Dangerous Drugs Act which limited the prescription of ‘hard’ drugs to hospital treatment centres of specially licensed doctors; and the Marine and Broadcasting Offences Act which suppressed offshore ‘pirate’ radio stations. Culturally the year saw a big Picasso show in Paris to celebrate the artist’s 85th birthday and a retrospective of the work of L.S.Lowry at London’s Tate Gallery.

The finances of the Royal Shakespeare Company were healthy thanks to an

increase in its grant from the Arts Council and a deal with American television to make colour films of outstanding Shakespeare productions. The year's World Theatre Season in London included Giorgio Strehler's production of Goldoni's A Servant of Two Masters; Danny Kaye appeared as Truffaldino in a production of the same play at Chichester. The Open Theatre of New York visited London with American Hurrah, a production which, like Charles Wood's Dingo originally commissioned by the National Theatre, could only be played to club-member audiences because of being banned by the Lord Chamberlain, whose days as a theatrical censor were by now numbered. Joe Orton saw the production of his latest work Crimes of Passion before being bludgeoned to death by his lover.

The all pervasive nature of theatrical censorship until its abolition is difficult to imagine today, even for those of us old enough to remember it. It was only in 1966 that the Lord Chamberlain allowed the words 'randy' and 'pissed' (as in, 'I'm a bit pissed tonight') in the revival of John Arden's Serjeant Musgrave's Dance. Arden wrote to Lord Willis prior to a debate in the Lords on theatrical censorship in 1966 arguing for abolition by saying, 'I do recognize that such radical views may not be very helpful in your capacity as a legislator.' (Findlater, p. 174) Findlater in the final chapter of his history of censorship which was published in 1967, argues for the abolition but acknowledges strong arguments for the retention of censorship: 'It may well be true, as Lord Goodman said in the Lords debate in 1966, that we have had a



more liberal stage in the last few years under the Lord Chamberlain, than we might have had if it had been abolished. It seems probable that for a few years after its abolition we will have a *less* liberal stage.' (Findlater p.180) But with the abolition of censorship came a new-found liberality for the British stage that resulted in the productions described below.

Popular culture saw Britain's reputation as the 'swinging' place to be confirmed with Sandie Shaw's winning the Eurovision Song Contest in Vienna with Puppet on a String. There were over a hundred cover versions of the song around the world within weeks. Bob Rafelson and Bert Schneider formed The Monkees, Gerry Dorsey changed his name to Engelbert Humperdink, Radio One went on the air, the Beatles released Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, Brian Epstein died and George Harrison went off to India to study with Ravi Shankar. David Hockney went to America's West coast and painted A Bigger Splash and in return the phrase 'flower power' arrived from the hippies of San Francisco and entered the language of London via Scott Mackenzie's hit song San Francisco which encouraged its listeners to 'wear a flower in your hair.'

All these changes, the music, the drugs, the politics, were reflected in what was being worn on the street. There were no-dress dresses, the zip-up flaring coat-dress, the swinging or clinging shift, mini-skirts under Dior's maxi-coats, Yves St Laurent's 'good little girl' smock dress combined with 'peel on',

knee-length, 'stocking boots'. Laurent confirmed the androgyny of much of this fashion with the introduction in the Spring of 1967 of his trouser suits.

The fashion correspondent of the Manchester Guardian, or rather their 'Paris correspondent on Women's Topics', Phyllis West Heathcote, wrote at the end of the year, 'By Spring and Summer colour had reached what could only be called a paroxysm of violence, including aggressive greens, strident pinks, orange, lemon and violet. Strongly accented floral prints in "psychedelic" colours and designs had their moments too.' (Britannica, p.341) As Kirk has noted about drag, 'it does not function in a vacuum, and the tremendous growth, in fragmentation and metamorphosis that cross-dressing was to experience during the sixties was part and parcel of an era in which non-conformity suddenly became a fashionable concept.' (Kirk, p.42)

This was the London in which this first run of As You Like It took place. After the run, in Koltai's reworked swinging London costumes and Pickup's Twiggy hair, 'there are few notes. Olivier has left. Accustomed now to the bizarre quality of their surroundings, the actors have produced the play from underneath its unusual wrappings. If there *are* nuances of the text of As You Like It which only an all-male cast can find, the aims of the National Theatre edged that night slowly towards achievement. Tuesday will tell.' (Sunday Times 1.10.67) Kott lunched with Williams on September 4th and sat in on rehearsal. 'He is pleased. "It's not drag....Look at those two there (Pickup and



Charles Kay). Even though they are playing the scene as women and developing the relationship as women, you can sense the maleness coming through. The polarity is there. That's what is in the text.'" (Sunday Times 1.10.67)

Pearson's notes on the casting are these:

Pickup is 27. 'One of the fastest-rising actors in the country....Pickup arrives at first rehearsal word perfect.'

Charles Kaye is 37. Quoted by Pearson:

'I'd played women at school, and wanted to see what kind of a challenge it was now. At least I'm playing my own species. That's better than playing a mole in 'Toad of Toad Hall' isn't it?'

Anthony Hopkins is 29. 'Arrives at rehearsal wondering whether he would play Audrey as a female impersonation or as a woman. Full of anxiety.'

Richard Kaye is 28. 'First reaction when given the part. "I wondered what my wife would think. Actually, she was quite cast down for a day or two."' (Sunday Times, 1.10.67)

'Pickup is looking for gesture that springs from the way a woman is made, from the inside; that way he hopes to avoid the camp flicks of the queer. All four, in turn, begin to discover the safety of playing for character as opposed to impersonating women in general; and separate identities start to emerge,

none of which embarrasses.’ (ST 1.10.67)

As we shall explore in the actors workshops, the very nature of what it is that an actor does is questioned in this rehearsal process. An actor impersonates another person (or perhaps a mole if they are in Toad of Toad Hall), in Stanislavski’s words, ‘building a character’. (Stanislavski, *passim*) To what extent is gender an issue in that creative process? Is it a dominant issue, a subsidiary issue or no issue at all?

The Sunday Times published a letter the week after Pearson’s article (the same day that Hobson’s review appeared) from Angus Eason, of Newcastle University, which argued that:

‘The ambiguity which will result [from an all male production] will bear no relation to that ‘understood’ by Elizabethan audiences. They

had no concept of women appearing on the stage, and so the device of men playing women’s parts (though exploited by Shakespeare) was entirely acceptable (‘natural’ even). Three hundred years of actresses have entirely changed our possible responses. Besides, women’s parts (and certainly all those in ‘As You Like It’) would have been played by boys, and not by men. There is a deal of difference between grown men and boys attempting a female role.’ (Sunday Times, 8.10.67)

But is there? As I have shown above, the terms ‘grown men’ and ‘boys’ are of little use to us today in describing the variety of male actors playing women on the Elizabethan stage, and Williams’ cast would have been the age equivalent of twelve year old - little eyeases - on Shakespeare’s stage.



In his history of the National Theatre, John Elsom tells a somewhat different story of the origins of the production. He tells of its being Dexter's idea, inspired by Kott's essay:

‘Dexter wanted to find that instrument. [Kott's ‘appropriate instrument’ - the cross-casting - that would allow the ‘astounding poetry’ of the play to be ‘fully revealed’] It was to be a production which would reflect the new mood of swinging London. He brought in Donovan, the folk singer, to write some songs....Everything seemed prepared - when Olivier seemed to get cold feet. He may have thought that Dexter was indulging himself by directing a drag show. Whatever the reason, Dexter found out that the schedules had been changed, with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead replacing his production.’  
(Elsom p.196)

There is no evidence from elsewhere that the play was already in rehearsal when Olivier removed it from the schedule, and it seems unlikely that having done so Olivier would have been so persistent in his attempts to persuade Williams to direct it. In Dexter's diaries, the entry for 4th March 1967 reads: ‘10-minute interview with LO. Sacked thank you very much.’ (Dexter, p. 19), and later, ‘Merely confirming what I already knew. I was not trainee manager material.’ (Dexter, p.19) The following day he wrote of, ‘...the covert undermining of the production, and that betrayal of trust. He could not have feared, as someone has said, that I would be over budget. Over the top. yes. Budget *NO*.’ (Dexter, p.19) And in Nice on 16th March: ‘...I read in the Telegraph that I had ‘resigned’, whereas I thought I had responded to ‘sacking’ with as much dignity as I could....’ (Dexter,p.20) Dexter returned to direct As You Like It at the National in 1979 - without any cross-casting. Dexter described his eventual production at the National as being ‘anti Kott’.

(Dexter, p.222) Dexter's letters confirm that McCartney (not Donovan) was asked to write the music and it took a long while for McCartney to turn down the commission which he eventually did because, 'I don't like the play, or Shakespeare, enough to do something good.' (Dexter, p.222)

The production team had found a way of making the convention they were asked to employ work. Having accepted the convention at the start of rehearsal it soon became absorbed into the usual rehearsal process. In the enclosed world of the rehearsal room one convention had been supplanted by another and become accepted without question by all involved. There was no intervening dominant convention in the rehearsal room. The changes in social convention outside - the sumptuary codes of dress and hair, of the representation of gender on the street, informed and strengthened the use of the convention by actors, designer and director. What would an audience, which had not been exploring and using the convention for weeks, make of seeing men as women in a play by Shakespeare for the first time in three hundred years?

## THE CRITICAL REACTION

It is clear from the reviews that the production was the cause of much speculation before it had even opened. The use of a revived stage convention was in itself news. For Punch it was 'the event of the week...naturally.'



(Punch 11.10.67) For The Daily Mail this was, 'the much-heralded, all-male As You Like It'. (Dail Mail 4.10.67) No critic went to it with an open mind. Writing in The Sunday Times, Harold Hobson stated, 'I have been opposed from the beginning to the idea of the National Theatre's all-male As You Like It... As soon as the idea was first mooted, it was evident to me that the experiment would be a failure.' (Sunday Times, 8.10.67) W.A.Darlington in The Daily Telegraph opened his review, 'Ever since the National Theatre announced the all-male production of As You Like It I have been trying to think out what point or purpose this experiment would serve, without success.' (Daily Telegraph 4.10.67)

The reviews were decidedly 'mixed' and many spent as much space arguing with Kott's programme note as they did with discussing the production itself. The dailies first. The production opened on 3rd October, a Tuesday. The common practice then was for reviews to be telephoned in immediately after the show, with little time for reflection on the part of the reviewer. The following morning the reviews were for the most part favourable. In The Daily Mail, Peter Lewis was one of the few who wrote about the production who did not review the programme:

'It is a conception of the play, so different, so strange, so visually and aurally hypnotic that the fact that all the girls are really men takes its place as merely one of the elements in a dream-like total experience, which you accept along with the rest....The moment at which we were watching, in fact, Ronald Pickup playing Rosalind playing the boy Ganymede pretending to be the girl Rosalind passed as smoothly as a dream in which the dreamer glides through layer on layer of different dream personages. I do not know that it would have been less effective

had the parts been taken by actresses. Perhaps. The play is about love and here love was portrayed as sexless, or rather sexually ambiguous. A paradox, but a tenable one. To commend Pickup's boy Rosalind by saying that he might as well have been a girl is no back-handed compliment. [ And of the other cross-dressed parts] They get their laughs but nowhere do they indulge in cheap drag acting." (Daily Mail 4.10.67)

In The Guardian, Philip Hope-Wallace rehearsed the polemics of the programme for the first 69 lines of his piece. This left only 53 to deal with the production. Hope-Wallace defended the idea of the production. '...it is well worth experimenting with if it frees Shakespeare from that mistrust with which our Victorian fathers looked on a certain side of his nature....' Hope-Wallace defended the concept of the production from the coded position of a gay critic on a suppressed 'gay' writer - anticipating the uses to which cross-dressing would be put in the years that followed. His review is an intelligent and thorough precis of the issues involved in the experiment of casting males in Shakespeare for the first time in 300 years and written by someone who was a noted opera critic and therefore aware of a different theatrical tradition of cross-dressed performance:

'Between a production using boys for girls and one dressing men as women there is as much difference as between a school room performance and the kind of camp concert resorted to in a battle ship. It is in the event the scenes of sheer bucolic humour that gain most by the treatment....The speaking is good, the expression highly intelligent. Apart from some monotony of timbre which the ear grew accustomed to, after longing at first for the interplay of treble and bass voices, the sound pattern was acceptable enough. But the margin of gain in those crucial exchanges between Rosalind and Orlando seemed dubious. If not embarrassing, they were somehow less effective than one has seen them....the National Theatre can at least claim that their transvestite version offers something 'different' and that, without traducing



Shakespeare.’ (Guardian 4.10.67)

In The Times, Irving Wardle was dismissive: ‘It (the production) offers no grand design; and seems mainly concerned with discovering (no doubt to the wrath of the company’s ladies) what happens when the women’s parts are played by men....the production works only spasmodically, and contains a number of pointless eccentricities.’ (The Times 4.10.67)

Darlington’s piece in The Daily Telegraph was headed ‘Experiment comes off brilliantly’. Having admitted that he could not see the reason for the production, ‘nor find one in the advance publicity which I read in the papers, I came to the conclusion that the only sensible course was to dismiss all such speculation from my mind, present myself at The Old Vic with a virgin surface and see what impression the production made, and how it came off. Well, it has come off brilliantly. Rosalind and Celia had not been on stage five minutes last night before I had accepted them completely.’ Here Darlington in adopting ‘a virgin surface’ is putting himself as far as it is possible to do so, in the position of an Elizabethan audience member. He is going to the theatre and watching a performance without giving any thought as to what the conventions are. He does not allow his intellect to obstruct the ‘suspension of disbelief’ that is required of any spectator at any performance. Or perhaps rather he tries to suspend the disbelief of his intellect. How possible this is we will try to find out during the audience research. He allows the conventions to work for themselves and *afterwards*, not before or during concludes, ‘...it does

not matter which sex the player of Rosalind belongs to, so long as he or she can act well enough to make us think first of the character and only secondarily of the player - which is anyhow the best test I know of a good actor.' This is the argument that will be taken up by Giles Havergal in the next chapter and which is an underlying thread of this thesis. Interestingly it is put forward by the most senior of the critics covering the production writing in the most reactionary newspaper. Yet it is the most radical of the views expressed by the dailies with a radicalism that, as we shall see, is disputed even today.

The important Sunday papers, whose writers had a few days to reflect upon the production, and who could also choose how much space to devote to a production in relation to the others opening that week, were The Sunday Times and The Observer whose critics could wield considerable influence over the success or otherwise of a show. The Observer had been Tynan's fiefdom from the Spring of 1954 (he was then just 27) until (with a brief break in New York) his move to the National Theatre in 1963. Ronald Bryden was his successor until he too moved on to become a Literary Manager - at the R.S.C. Bryden took a fierce dislike to the production:

'...the best verdict on the National Theatre's all-male As You Like It is that of Danny La Rue, overheard by the *Guardian* in the Old Vic's crush bar: "Well, it's very interesting, of course, but I don't see the point of it." Clifford Williams' production is interesting....But it proves nothing - it's hard to see what it could hope to - about Shakespeare or his play....His production is an essay not in Renaissance paedophilia, but in the contemporary cult - here we go again - of Camp....Into this [Koltai's setting], Williams has introduced four exercises in drag



acting.’ Bryden concedes some felicities in the production but concludes ‘...the production’s beauties and ingenuities seem largely irrelevant to the play itself....It is a success of a kind for the National, but of the same kind as the deplorable Much Ado which Zeffirelli suggested because he found As You Like It, which he’d been offered, too boring. It looks suspiciously as if the point which eluded Danny La Rue was that someone up there at the National agreed.’ (Observer 8.10.67)

What is clear from reading all these reviews is that a spectator sees what *he* (and these professional spectators were conspicuously all men) wants to see, or allows himself to see. Again we shall return to this issue with our audience research. Abandon convention and you create confusion. Does a universally accepted convention control what the spectator sees by not allowing them to raise questions? In going to the opera, the spectator does not ask, why is everyone singing. Neither in watching a musical do they ask why do people sing some of the time.

The adoption in this one production, against the ‘conventional convention’ of the day, of a new convention challenged the spectator, whilst the novelty of the idea drew an audience which was paying to accept that challenge. But was this convention any different to or stranger than those in other productions which opened that year? The As You Like It at Birmingham Repertory Theatre that October had Elizabethan verse being spoken in a deliberately ‘Swinging London’ version of the play. Was this convention any more *outré* than those of Koltai’s settings which were unanimously praised by the critics: ‘...brilliant...a wintry futurist dreamscape of glistening synthetic materials,

populated by courtly astronauts in gleaming PVC, Lurex and snowy nylon fun-furs.' (Bryden, Observer, 8.10.67)

Harold Hobson in The Sunday Times take us back to where we began:

'Even if we could get a perfect reproduction of an Elizabethan performance of As You Like It, it would still not have on an audience of today the effect it produced on Shakespeare's contemporaries. The reason for this is simple and obvious. To see women played by boys was a thing of custom to the Elizabethans, whilst to us it is a matter of surprise, for speculation, and for innuendo.' (Sunday Times 8.10.67)

But having admitted to being opposed to the production before he saw it,

Hobson admits:

'Well, I was wrong. This As You Like It is not a failure, but an outstanding success; and the nature of its success is such that it must modify all our suppositions about sex-transference in the playing of Shakespeare's female characters. It proves in the first place that the reasoning on which I relied to substantiate my objections to the experiment was fallacious. But it does something more important than that. It does in actual demonstration refute Professor Kott's notion (so compelling in the abstract) that the casting of males as women brings into the theatre a special quality of erotic ambiguity. Its real effect turns out to be that it puts eroticism, whether ambiguous or straightforward, out of the theatre altogether....when one comes to the marvellous quartet on the ache and unfulfilled desire of love near the end of the play there is a purity, a 'magical release from material dominion', as Mr. Williams' himself says, that has probably not been achieved in any professional performances in the last 300 years. But the principal achievement of the piece is Mr. Williams' direction of it. It is insufficient to say that he avoids the temptation to create the freakish or the sensational. He seems unaware even that the temptation could exist, so quietly absorbed is he in the sweet propriety of his interpretation. (Sunday Times 8.10.67)

This first attempt to professionally revive a play by Shakespeare with an all



male cast challenged the critics and left them divided in their opinions. Having only ever seen productions that used the dominant convention of gender contiguous casting, it was with this dominant convention in mind that the production of As You Like It was considered. The reviews are as much about the use of a revived convention as about the production itself.

Williams and his actors had succeeded in finding a way to use the convention in rehearsal and on stage but the audiences as represented by the critics had not yet found a comfortable way to view the convention or absorb it into their viewing of the performance. They had not found a way of relating the thoughts about the convention to their discussion of the merits of the production itself. With this production British theatre now had an alternative convention to use in the representation of women in the plays of Shakespeare. In the next chapter I shall examine how it was used in subsequent productions.

## CHAPTER 4

In this chapter I chronicle the development of conventions of gender performance subsequent to the 1967 As You Like It, looking in particular at The Glasgow Citizens Theatre's production of Hamlet in 1970, Prospect Theatre's Pericles in 1973 and Lindsay Kemp's A Midsummer Night's Dream of 1979. Two productions of Twelfth Night, Neil Bartlett's at Chicago's Goodman Theatre in 1992 and Ariane Mnouchkine's for Théâtre du Soleil in 1982 are also used as points of comparison.

I analyse the different reasons for the cross-casting; relate the cross-casting to developments in sexual politics (including gay politics); show how the culture surrounding popular music made cross-gender casting socially acceptable; and confirm the relationship between social and theatrical conventions. I also demonstrate how Lindsay Kemp was a key figure linking developments in the theatrical conventions of the representation of gender with the culture of popular music and gay culture. The chapter concludes with a summary of the opinions of theatre directors as to the possible uses and limitations of the theatrical representation of gender.

We have seen above how an intellectual climate and changing social conventions allowed for the first performance in three hundred years of a play by Shakespeare with an all male cast of actors. This was in London in 1967. The production was not immediately followed by others making use of the



revived convention. Williams had proved at the National Theatre, that it was possible to perform a Shakespeare play with male actors playing the female characters, but the experiment did not lead to others for some years. The revived convention appeared to have limited uses. It may be that the abolition of theatrical censorship in 1968 was a factor in this. It was not, as some had predicted (Findlater), that the abolition of censorship would lead in the first few years to a less liberal stage, but just the opposite. As I show below, the immediate birth of 'fringe' theatre; of uncensored plays; of representation on stage of the previously unrepresentable (God, the Queen and so on); nudity on stage,<sup>1</sup> meant that just as one particular convention relating to gender representation was revived, a whole swathe of new, alternative, conventions were being invented. It was not until the changes in social convention that were seen in London in 1967 began to become accepted throughout Britain that the convention started to be used again. This happened first in 1970 in Glasgow.

#### HAMLET AT THE GLASGOW CITIZENS THEATRE

Three years after the National's As You Like It, another all-male production of a Shakespeare play created all the controversy that for the most part the

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<sup>1</sup> Maggie Wright was the first actor to appear naked on the 'legitimate' stage, as Helen of Troy in the RSC's production of Marlowe's Dr Faustus in June 1968. By September of that year the entire cast of Hair, male actors and female, could be seen naked every night on the stage of the Shaftesbury Theatre.

National's show had failed to create. If the National Theatre's As You Like It became a *succès d'estime* the Glasgow Citizen's Hamlet was a genuine *succès de scandale*. Of the production The Scotsman declared (in review notable for being printed for the first time in the paper's history, on the front page) that, '...it is shameful that this should be the play's first production in Glasgow for ten years, giving many young people a warped impression of it.' (The Scotsman, 7th September 1970)

The reaction in Glasgow was extreme, as I will show below. This was because the liberality of social convention that was a feature of London in 1967, was not yet a feature of Glasgow in 1970. Havergal himself had just arrived in Glasgow from London and had seen Williams' As You Like It three years before. Hamlet was his first production at The Citizens. He brought with him to Scotland the social and theatrical conventions that were now unexceptionable in London but which had yet to find acceptability in Scotland. So acceptable were these conventions to Havergal that he did not anticipate any problems with them at The Citizens. This perceived acceptability allowed him to cross-cast his play for very different reasons to Williams. The National As You Like It was staged for two reasons - to see if it was possible to have men play women and so illuminate the text and (perhaps) for Tynanesque sensation. Havergal, three years later, (after the National failed to shock 'swinging London' but proved it possible to once again have men play women on the London stage) knew that it was possible and had no



need to create sensation - just the reverse in his new job. Havergal's reasons for an all-male cast were different: 'There were two reasons. One was aesthetic, the other was practical as so often in the theatre...and I'm not honestly sure which came first.' (Havergal, interview with the writer) The aesthetic reason was to do with the representation of Hamlet as a loner where:

'everyone in the court was against him. [This was shown in the dressing of all the actors in long black robes whatever their character.] Probably more important was that we were just starting a permanent company at the time [of six women and twelve men] and two of the women didn't arrive for the first production which this was and we needed the other four for the play in the other theatre...so we were just left with twelve men [on the main stage] and we decided we'd do it with men because that was all there was. And it has a significance this because it was the very first production of what is now (and is still 24 years on) the Citizen's Company.' (Havergal, interview)

The team led by Havergal had already been in Glasgow a year:

'doing much more conventional things with much more conventional casts. And what we did was this: we got together a gang of kids, the average age was 22; we paid them all the same and we just threw them into everything. So it made sense, if one wanted to, to simply do it in drag. And in fact it was a sort of way of pinning the complete change in the theatre's policy to the mast. So I think that's the answer really. It did have an aesthetic purpose but it was extremely pragmatic and it was also political.' (Havergal, interview)

As with the National's As You Like It, Havergal sees that historical timing of importance. The actors did not question the casting for a moment. 'This was 1970, this was a significant date...the 60s had finally...reached Scotland...and everybody had long hair and wide trousers and everybody was smoking pot and everybody was fucking each other.... And I don't think the sort of young actors we then had turned a hair.' (Havergal, interview)

This confirms my thesis that without changes in social convention it is impossible to make changes in theatrical convention. It was only just possible for Havergal to get away with his use of the revived convention in Glasgow. What made it possible were actors from London who had no problem with the convention and the arrival in Glasgow, at the same time as the actors, of new social attitudes.

The cross-dressing was not confined to this one production, it became emblematic of the company's new style and has been a part of the Citizens' way of working ever since. 'In every play we did that season there was cross-dressing of one sort or another.' (Havergal, interview) In Brecht's Mother Courage, Yvette was played by a man; in Shaw's St. Joan, the Dauphin was played by a woman. 'This is always because we had a permanent company and we had to make it suit and our attitude was, you get the best actor in the company to play the part irrespective of whether they're male or female.' (Havergal, interview)

Havergal makes a point of the age of his actors in relation to the casting possibilities. The company had an average age of 22, 'hip' actors as he calls them, many straight out of college and a few years younger than the actors who played in the National Theatre production three years earlier. Even closer in age to the actors who would have first played the roles in the original production. In Hamlet there were just two female roles to be cast: Ophelia and



Gertrude. There was no discussion before the production about the decision to cross-cast because it seemed an unexceptional thing to do. Havergal did not even bother to tell the board, who 'didn't know until they arrived [for the opening night]'. (Havergal, interview). In the event the decision resulted in great controversy. 'It caused an absolute furore. A huge, huge scandal...' (Havergal, interview) The critical response was 'an absolute catastrophe. It was a huge scandal. It was said to be the biggest scandal in the arts in Glasgow since the Picasso exhibition in the Thirties. There were letters about it in the paper for a month, every single day. Schools cancelled; then the children came under their own steam. Two important members of the theatre administration resigned over it....And I very nearly was sacked! But it was full.' (Havergal, interview) At the end of the first night there were cheers and boos throughout the theatre, a reaction Havergal has never heard in the Citizens since.

'The whole movement of the sixties finally hit Glasgow with that production. Suddenly it was long hair, it was beautiful people, it was drag, it was madness, it was way out, it was all in a black box....' (Havergal, interview) David Hayman, who played Hamlet, has similar memories:

'Brecht said that theatre should create moral scandal, and Giles and Philip [Prowse, the designer] understood that very well. It was a heady time, and the life-style we were involved in was almost as exciting as the work itself. We were playing with our sexuality on stage and off. This was 1969, remember; [off-stage] I was wearing eye make-up, an ear-ring, a woman's fur coat, a great sombrero hat and my hair down to my shoulders. I was even ahead of Mick Jagger.' (quoted in Coveney, p.45)

Havergal nearly lost his job, saved only by two things: the excellent box office (the best the theatre had done for years) and an influential woman councillor who defended him when he was summoned before the board. 'The production became known as 'The Drag Hamlet' and 'The Naked Hamlet', the latter of which it wasn't.' (Havergal, interview) Popular success turned around the critical response. At the end of the run Havergal recalls that the Glasgow Herald wrote: 'The Citizens may be going to hell in a handcart with this production but a hell of a lot of young people in Glasgow are going with it.' (Havergal, interview)

'There were boos, cheers, hisses at the end - but no one went to sleep...it was very exciting...a damned good try to get back a lost audience.' (Scots Independent, quoted by Coveney p.43) Harold Hobson in The Sunday Times took up a position that was to be the dominant one in London criticism of the Citizens Theatre over the decades to follow:

Mr. Havergal made Watford one of the most impressive repertory theatre in England. Yet in the storm of obloquy that has broken out over Mr. Havergal this week, in Edinburgh no less than in Glasgow, with threats that his theatre may lose its subsidy unless it loses him, one is asked to believe that the air of Scotland is so corrupting that a man whose work in England has never been subject to the least reproach has immediately after crossing the border produced something which is a public disgrace.' (Quoted in Coveney, p.44)

Hobson had not yet seen the production. As Coveney himself says, 'What was obviously cataclysmic in terms of Glasgow theatre was perhaps not so wildly aberrant by general theatre standards of the time.' (Coveney p.41) This



strengthens the argument about the relationship between theatrical and social convention, demonstrating that acceptability of both social and theatrical convention can vary widely geographically within one society.

Three years previously, the male actors in the National Theatre's As You Like It had no living performance tradition upon which to draw in representing female gender on the stage. One of the first questions in rehearsal was: how to do it? For the Citizens' actors, male actors playing female characters was one of a number of alternative theatrical conventions that were now available. Havergal, looking back after thirty years of directing cross-cast performances, has strong views on how it was, and should, be done. For him, unlike Olivier and Stallybrass, there was never any question of prosthetics. 'I've never done it with tits,' he told me. (Havergal, interview). Indeed for Havergal, reinventing the performance tradition after the National's experiment, the actors were not required to perform gender as such.

'I never go for that....I try and get them to play what is the essence of the scene irrespective of whether it's a man or a woman....It's really the force of the scene, who is winning at any point or who is losing, or who wants or who is withholding. This is another way that we also get around age (or did in those days because we had such young people, Rupert Fraser was 22 and played Polonius in the same production....I always say don't age up. They never put on grey wigs or grey make-up.' (Havergal, interview)

Havergal describes it as a matter of 'becoming' rather than 'playing' an old man. Or a woman. We go back here to Olivier's request for breasts in 'As

You Like It' but also get to the heart of the question of what acting, on the Western stage, is.

'We don't have the conventional illusions of character transformations.'  
(Havergal, interview) that word conventional again:

'They didn't do any flirtatious women acting at all. Maybe the hands were a little more demonstrative. Certainly in the case of the Queen who was played by an actor [Jeremy Nicholas] very unsuited to that in many ways, he was very tall and thin. He had a very, very long jaw like face, and Philip [Prowse, the designer] got him up in this huge black wig and he looked like this Beardsley monster. And of course the closet scene was extremely violent because it was played by two men.'  
(Havergal, interview)

Does this imply that one can get nearer to the truth of a scene with two men playing the characters? 'Yes. Well I have a sort of theory about the fact that the Shakespeare scenes particularly lend themselves to being played by men, provided its played sympathetically. I think something happens in the scene which doesn't happen when it's played by a woman, he [Shakespeare] would never even have considered it.' (Havergal, interview) Havergal believes that the scenes need to be played by men to work fully but that is the *capabilities* of the actors that are as important as their gender: 'A good male actor is better than a bad female actor and vice versa.' (Havergal, interview) These issues will be taken up in the workshops later in this thesis as will the question of physical illusion - the extent to which one needs to disguise the gender of the actor when cross-casting.



An example of the lack of physical illusion is provided by Havergal's production of Anthony and Cleopatra (Citizens Theatre, May 1972) when Jonathan Kent playing Cleopatra 'was manifestly a man. He was naked to the waist, with a sarong...and his own hair...and he looked quite wonderful, absolutely alluring beyond all words....He clearly wasn't a woman, whatever else he was.' (Havergal, interview)

Havergal does not feel that his production of Hamlet made any sexual political statement but that it did make a statement about the nature of theatre at The Citizens, about the shared aesthetic of the team which was now running the building. 'We were very conscious of using it as a device which told you more about the theatre. Told you you were in a theatre. Told you you shouldn't be looking for naturalism, because the theatre isn't the place for naturalism. And nothing nails that to the mast more than putting a man into a dress.' (Havergal, interview)

The cross-cast Hamlet at the Citizens can be seen then as a political statement, an aesthetic statement, an artistic policy statement and a style statement as well as a pragmatic response both to the text and to the practicalities of casting. It was also a production very much of its time, although the use of cross-casting in performance has since become a hall mark of the theatre's production style. Anthony and Cleopatra (May 1972), Twelfth Night (May 1971), Macbeth (February 1979) all had men playing women,

though the theatre has never cross-cast women as men. This failure to cast women in male roles is not unique to the Citizens, indeed it is symptomatic of the great majority of the productions that have followed the 1967 As You Like It. I will return to why this might be later.

### PROSPECT'S PERICLES

The next production I look at is Prospect Theatre's Pericles in 1973. We will see how a cross-cast production challenges convention when it is seen not just in Britain but in performances in countries with very different social and theatrical conventions from those in Britain. 'Pericles just scrapes into the Shakespeare canon. Of doubtful authorship, possibly a collaboration, it is one of the least performed of Shakespeare's plays. The reasons may be that it is fairly strong meat. The brothel scenes, for example, have a sodden whiff about them; and judged on the page, much of Pericles has been dismissed as crude and ineffective.' (Robertson, 1990 p.vii) Toby Robertson's comments in his forward to the Doubleday edition of Shakespeare's play in 1990 are also to be found in the programme notes to his production of the play for Prospect Theatre Company in 1973. Prospect, a British touring company with no home theatre of its own, had been booked by the British Council to tour three productions abroad in its tenth anniversary year. The plays were Twelfth Night, Peter Shaffer's The Royal Hunt of the Sun and Pericles. The production of Pericles opened at Leeds Playhouse in June 1973 and toured throughout



Britain as well as to Nicosia, Cairo, Baalbeck, Athens, Dubrovnik and Brussels.

‘The style of the production involving open stage, minimal conventional scenery, relatively simple lighting and reliance on costume, properties and above all music and movement, arises partly from the requirement that the productions be equally effective in seventeen disparate theatres and partly from a desire to make the text speak for itself.’ (Robertson, Programme note)

The ‘strong meat’ of the play was confronted head on and Robertson set the entire play within the Brothel at Mytilene from Act 4 of the play. Harold Innocent played the bawd, Jan Waters, Boult ‘her [i.e. the bawd’s] man’. Three male actors played the whores and the whole production told the story of the play itself acted out within the brothel scene within the play. The cross-dressing within the brothel extended to the whole of the play.

If Havergal’s Hamlet was the sixties culture of swinging London finally coming to Glasgow, Robertson’s ‘Pericles’ saw it taken on the road, around the Mediterranean and back to London where it ended at the Roundhouse, the quintessential seventies London venue.

‘The Prospect Theatre Company chose to produce ‘Pericles’ because most of our tour was to take us around the Mediterranean, near sites mentioned in the play: For example, Tyre, Ephesus, Mytilene. In contrast to a fairly orthodox Twelfth Night in an Illyrian setting, we gave Pericles a modern, transvestite production, mirroring the reversal of sexuality that is a feature of the text. The production recreated in almost Geneteskue terms the decadence of the Weimar Republic; the brothel scene in Act IV overflowed to encompass the whole.’

(Robertson, 1990, p. ix)

The cross-dressing and the brothel setting were not the concept that Roberston took into the start of rehearsals. 'We started rehearsals on Monday, and I think by Tuesday afternoon or something, I said, we've got to stop, this is no good...will you all go away 'till Friday. And I worked with Carl Davies [the composer] and we came back on Friday.' (Robertson, interview with the writer) When rehearsals started up again the problems were overcome [Robertson has no recollection now as to what those problems were] and the production went on to become one of the company's great triumphs. 'It was very, very, simple. It was decadent at the same time....It was quite sexy in a way, a lot of attractive young men traipsing around in women's costumes.' (Robertson, interview)

Pericles toured the world. The reactions it received differed markedly from country to country. 'When we did it in Athens, it was about five days before the elections that got rid of the Colonels, and the Colonels were all there and they were very unhappy with it. And you know they [the audience] wouldn't let us go.' (Robertson, interview) The production's final chorus of 'New Joy Wait on You' kept the Greek applause going for more than an hour. That chorus captured the national mood in Greece at the time but also captured a more general mood of the times which led to its continued success and eventual transfer to the West End of London. The company were not allowed to show the production in Cairo, though they did present the other two



productions in their repertoire, and they were not allowed to visit Israel at all because they were visiting Egypt. ‘The production was considered too shocking by the Russian authorities for Moscow or Leningrad. Ironically The Royal Hunt of the Sun about the military rape of a country, was deemed acceptable. But the play was unacceptable in Cairo because of Islamic fundamentalism.’ (Robertson, 1990, p.x)

If Havergal’s Hamlet did not take its cross-dressing from the text of the play, Robertson’s Pericles did. ‘I think it is very text based,’ argues Robertson in recalling why the cross-casting had happened (Robertson, interview). He points to two particular references:

*Pericles (to his long-lost daughter): “thou are a man, and I  
Have suffered like a girl.” (V/i 136/7 )*  
and

*Marina: Are you a woman?  
Bawd: What would you have me be, and I be not a woman? (IV/ii 78/79.)*

Robertson, in both the programme to the production and his forward to the play, echoes the Platonic halving of the genders by quoting from the Greek poet C.P.Cavafy:

*“one half of the house must be pulled down  
This way he will grow virtuously into knowledge.”*  
(Strengthening the Spirit, C.P.Cavafy, quoted Robertson, 1990, p.ix and Programme to Pericles)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> One of the male actors in the company having played a women in the production had a sex-change after the tour, tearing down half of his house in a physical rather than metaphoric way.

The first major coverage of the production in the British press was an article by Sidney Edwards in the London Evening Standard on 3rd August 1973. Edwards travelled with the company Mediterranean and his four-column piece was headed 'Illyrian Scandals of 1973 - a tale of camels, the sphinx and those black suspenders.' The show was about to return to Britain to play The Roundhouse, prior to being seen at the Edinburgh Festival. Edwards wrote:

'Pericles...has been causing a sensation. The word is not lightly chosen. Robertson has set the play in a brothel and most of the actors are in drag with rouged faces and curls, either bikinis and gold stars and little else or a fearsome Blue Angel outfit (worn by Harold Innocent) of black suspenders, a corset, black kinky boots and a feathery negligee. There are whippings, orgies and sexual obscenities. Imagine the reaction of an audience expecting English good taste in Shakespeare....' (Sidney Edwards, Evening Standard 3rd August 1973)

Edwards noted that the reaction to the production had been 'overwhelming.'

'In the Herod Atticus Theatre the other night 5000 Athenians rushed down from their seats on to the stage cheering and applauding the cast. It was a remarkable demonstration.' (Sidney Edwards, Evening Standard 3rd August 1973)

The critics in the Middle East had been as enthusiastic as the audiences:

'What a glorious show! Sometimes decadent and odorous, sometimes crude and vulgar, always ironic, full of 'kitsch' and soap-opera farce, evoking Turkish harems of the turn of the century and the notorious cabarets of Hitler's Germany, mocking theatre-in-the-round, theatre-within-theatre, and constantly mocking itself, with an elegance composed of refinement and depravity, of truth camouflaged beneath debauchery.' (C. Boulad, As-Safa, Beirut date unknown, quoted on handbill to Her Majesty's run, Prospect archive)



‘With their performance of *Pericles* by Shakespeare, the Prospect Theatre Company from London justified their international reputation and demonstrated that they belong to the most modern theatrical companies and interpret Shakespeare daringly and wittily.’ (Nasko Frndic, Burba, Belgrade, date unknown, quoted on handbill to Her Majesty’s run, Prospect archive)

Edwards ended his piece: ‘I can’t wait to see how the good folk of Edinburgh react to their *Pericles*.’ (Edwards) The production was an enormous success both at the Roundhouse and in Edinburgh. A further international tour followed prior to a transfer to Her Majesty’s Theatre in the West End.

The production, which used many of the performance conventions of the Middle East was well received in its Mediterranean performances and only had problems because of its perceived *political* content rather than any sexual or gender issues. In London and Edinburgh, six years after the National’s *As You Like It* and three years after the Citizens *Hamlet*, the cross-dressing was not an issue. In the Soviet Union however, where social and theatrical conventions were very different, the production was not even allowed to be performed.

The Diarist on the Daily Express ‘was surprised to learn that the Russians had banned the production,’ but allowed *Twelfth Night* to tour to the Soviet Union. ‘Does the Kremlin cultural department not realise that this famous comedy is about an older woman falling in love with a girl dressed as a boy?’

(Daily Express, 24th April 1974) ‘Apparently, representatives of the Ministry of Culture saw the production...in the Roundhouse in London and then expressed the view that it was ‘too difficult for Russian audiences to understand.’’ (Sean Day-Lewis, The Daily Telegraph, 22nd April 1974) The banning by the Soviets received extensive coverage in the British press and no doubt helped promote the West End run.

The reviews of the West End transfer were not unanimous in their praise. In The Daily Telegraph, John Barber dismissed the brothel device as ‘a gimmick’ and complained of ‘a director who shuns romance and offers conjuring tricks as a substitute for magic.’ (John Barber, Daily Telegraph 28th May 1974) In The Guardian, the openly gay critic Nicholas de Jongh, grudgingly admitted to having enjoyed the production but found its conceits undermined the play itself.:

‘Time, sufferings and journeys lead from loss to restoration and joy, which hardly sets with a collection of petulant transvestites. So Mr. Robertson has had with some ingenuity to twist the play into a musical charade, a sour mockery of joy and emotion for the brothel inmates. But the real brothel scenes lose their force since a male whore house would hardly welcome Pericles’s daughter unless to dress her as a boy. With these central imbalances, and a strange mix of contemporary and ancient dress, the play does not truly acquire the nightmare sensations I feel Mr. Robertson sought.’ (Nicholas de Jongh, The Guardian, 28th May 1974)

Here the nature of the cross-dressing demonstrates a confusion in the critical response. Was this a cross-dressed production or a drag brothel? What gender was Harold Innocent’s Bawd? Or Jan Waters’ Boulton the brothel-man? Were



these characters *en travestie* or actors playing cross-gender?

A writer in *The Stage* noted:

‘...I can’t recall feeling such a sensation of joy after watching Shakespeare ever before. Of course, Prospect’s glorious Pericles at Her Majesty’s is very much the Bard *a la mode*, suitably enlivened with songs, slapstick and comic interludes for the groundlings, and a veritable firework display of theatrical effects. But this now familiar jackdaw device of collecting bright bits from everywhere is brilliantly successful here....’ (P.S.G., *The Stage*, 6th June 1974)

There were alternative views:

‘Pericles, or the pooves’ paradise, from the Prospect Theatre Company is only on for a limited season - and to judge from the second night audience it may be even more limited than the company bargained for....The play amounts to little more than an excuse for a jolly, and completely clean, romp. What is missing is any guts, even in the romping.’ (Mark Hofman, *City Press*, 6th June 1974) Note the pejorative ‘pooves’ an echo of the ‘Nancys’ who staged Twelfth Night at the YMCA in the 1920s.

So what has happened in the less than six years that separate As You Like It from Pericles, from the academic and purist discussion of whether roles can be cross cast on the Shakespearian stage, via the outrage of the Citizens Hamlet to the pleasurable equanimity that greeted the Prospect production, ‘...offered vivaciously as a play-within-a-play in a vaguely contemporary male brothel,’ (Kenneth Hurren, *Spectator*, 8th June 1974) and toured throughout Britain and Europe as an example of the best of British theatre?

For audience and critics the boundaries of stage convention had been widened - perhaps even torn apart. The As You Like It and the work of the Citizens played a major part in that, as did the growth of 'the fringe' or 'alternative theatre.' The nature of what was possible on stage had changed. There were two defining events in which changes in legislation saw changes in social convention reflected in the law and thereby literally 'allowed' changes in theatrical convention. One, as we have seen above, was the abolition in 1968 of the Lord Chamberlain's powers of censorship. The other was the legalisation of homosexuality in 1969 following the Wolfenden Report.

Fringe theatre had been born in London (via The Traverse in Edinburgh) with Jim Haynes' Arts Lab on Drury Lane in 1968. 'In the one short year of its existence, it had an enormous impact, capturing the spirit of the counter-culture, presenting the first of a new generation of writers, actors and directors who were rejecting the structures of conventional theatre institutions.' (Itzin, p.9) The development of 'the fringe' was swift and exponential, from one production in 1967, C.A.S.T.'s Mr. Oligarchy's Circus, to forty in 1968, fifty in 1969 and sixty in 1970.<sup>3</sup> The development of the

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<sup>3</sup> Figures taken from Itzin's chronology (Itzin, pps 363-389). Itzin's list is inevitably not fully comprehensive; it was in the nature of the alternative theatre movement that it went largely without documentation, only the listings in Tony Elliot's 'Time Out' providing a record of productions and events. Itzin also includes productions by The Royal Court and the RSC who were themselves now doing 'experimental' work.



fringe had an almost immediate effect on the large subsidised companies. Charles Marovitz' Hamlet collage (first seen in the RSC's 'Theatre of Cruelty' season which Marovitz directed with Peter Brook at L.A.M.D.A. in 1964) was revived in 1969 at The Open Space. And Brook's production of A Midsummer Night's Dream on the main stage at Stratford in 1970 had revolutionised perceptions of how a Shakespeare play could be produced.

There was another non-Shakespearian production that changed the nature of what was acceptable/permissible on the commercial London stage, confronting every concept and convention of gender and sexuality. Richard O'Brien's The Rocky Horror Show opened at the tiny Theatre Upstairs at the Royal Court on 19th June 1973, transferring on 14th August to the Kings Road Classic (a cinema) and from there on 3rd November to the Essoldo Cinema Chelsea, and eventually to the Comedy in the West End - a total run of 2,960 performances. Opening the same month as Prospect's Pericles transferred to the West End it, too, exemplified the *Zeitgeist* on stage.

#### KEMP'S DREAM

Robertson remembers asking Lindsay Kemp to choreograph Pericles and it may be that a conversation with Kemp during the difficulties of the first week of rehearsal was a critical one. According to 'Plays and Players': 'The idea of setting the play in a male brothel in fact originated with Lindsay Kemp....and

there are those who feel his suggestion has been only tamely adopted.' (anon. Plays and Players, May 1974) Kemp had also been an influence in Glasgow where he was working alongside Giles Havergal. 'He [Kemp] both anticipated and influenced the Havergal Citizens in that he brought elements of the new fashionable androgyny, and the rock concert, into the theatre.' (Coveney, p.41)

Lindsay Kemp formed his first company in 1962. Although he did not come to wide public attention until his production of Flowers in 1974, he had been invited by Giles Havergal to present an all-male production of The Maids by Jean Genet at the Citizens in The Close in 1969, and had been involved, as we have seen, in Prospect's Pericles. Kemp had also, in 1972, staged the Ziggy Stardust concerts for David Bowie, a former member of his company, 'and in so doing changed the face of rock performance.' (Haughton, 1986)<sup>4</sup>

Kemp brought together in his work a number of strands that are crucial to the

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<sup>4</sup> 'Mr Bowie started it all. Everybody was influenced by him. We have grown so used nowadays to seeing Bowie as Mr Mainstream Music that we forget what a wonderfully corrupting influence he was in his time....many of his influences were gay....He was exploring a world that was hitherto unexplored in mainstream pop music and the influences shows...it showed in his 1972 revelation that he was bisexual...and it showed most of all in his public utterances advocating androgyny. Bowie generally used the word in its very limited sense, as it is normally used today, to mean a visual uniting of the physical characteristics of both sexes, though he also used androgynous concepts in his lyrics as part of a futuristic ideal. But what a generation of fans who were both mentally and sexually turned on by Bowie learned was the beauty of physically establishing the perfect mix of 'masculine' and 'feminine'. It wasn't drag and it wasn't straight: that was it's beauty - it was about confusion.' (Kirk, pps 110-112)



development of cross-gender performance: work in both 'straight' and 'experimental' theatre; the fusion of theatre and rock music; sexual androgyny on stage; and unapologetic homo-eroticism.

He also claims to be descended from William Kemp, clown in Shakespeare's company, The Chamberlain's Men, and the actor for whom the roles of Bottom, Dogberry and Lancelot Gobbo were written. Kemp was one of the 26 men listed in the First Folio as the 'Principal Actors' in Shakespeare's plays. His being named in an early text of Romeo and Juliet at IV.v.99 is generally assumed to indicate that he played the role of Peter, the Nurse's servant. But is it not possible that he played the nurse herself - surely a less fanciful suggestion than that a leading member of the company would play the tiny role of the servant against a young boy in the role of the Nurse? Kemp was with The Chamberlain's Men until 1599. He left to be replaced by Robert Armin. 'He was a big man who specialised in plebian clowns, who spoke in earthy language, with seemingly ingenuous spontaneity, often addressing the audience in frank asides.' (Boyce p.335) Here then we have a direct link between the performing practice of Shakespeare's own company, and a rebirth of those practices three hundred years later.

Lindsay Kemp's Flowers - a pantomime for Jean Genet, was first seen in 1972 (at the Traverse in Edinburgh and then at the Bush in London). It has never left the repertoire of the company. 'All this time, the eternal war-horse of the

repertoire has been Flowers...which from its first wild improvised performance sixteen years ago has evolved and purified into a kind of 'classic'.' (Haughton 1986) The important thing about Flowers is that the central role of Divine, a creature of great feminine beauty is played not by a woman but by a man:

'Most striking is the character of Divine, played by Kemp himself; dressed *en Grande Dame*, he moves with an incomparable elegance and dignity. Only *his* trembling hand suggests *her* terror of a slow death [my italics]. But she is always prepared to love: the more she grows in nobility, the more clearly we perceive her poverty and wretchedness. If for Genet thought is translated into action, Kemp's premise is that things can be changed by will. His 'Divine' can become, even if only for a moment, all that she believes herself to be.' (Haughton programme)

The shifting personal pronouns indicate the uncertainty of gender. He/She become interchangeable; 'Divine' is the eternal feminine, there is no maleness about her. Kemp was thirty-three when he first played the role. He has continued to play it until well into his fifties. Yet his physique is such that he defies the obviousness of casting. 'His is a theatre of erotic sensuality, abandoned yet highly controlled. He plays with gender, often adopting a female role. But he is in no way a drag artiste, he does not impersonate but seems to embody the femininity he seeks to present, and he can generate a feeling at odds to the physical appearance.' (Haughton programme)

Kemp's work, and especially his own performance in Flowers, strikes at the heart of the debate about the performance of gender on stage and also, as the years have gone by, at the relationship between the age of the performer and



the playing of gender. Jarman locates what Kemp was doing within its historical context: 'During the sixties, many performers were making public statements here in Britain about what one could and couldn't do.... Yet here was Lindsay Kemp's company doing everything one wasn't supposed to be able to get away with - quite naturally, without making a great fuss, as an intrinsic part of the performance.' (Derek Jarman, forward to Wilms p.5)

Jarman makes the point that, 'By starting off in England he [Kemp] was up against word-bound Anglo-Saxon theatrical traditions where visual messages are not always read by people.' (Jarman, p.6) This too links back to an Elizabethan theatre that was largely *aural* rather than *visual*. The work of Kemp and others moved the British stage on from an *aural* to a *visual* theatre.

Jarman also makes the point that Kemp 'happened right at that moment when British law reform had made homosexuality between consenting males legal.' (Jarman p.6) But it was not Kemp's aim simply to shock: 'It was never my intention to be shocking, but to be astonishing. And I do want to astonish the public, to thrill them. To take their breathe away.' (interview with Rogers, p.14) That desire to astonish is clear in Kemp's production of A Midsummer Night's Dream which was first seen in Rome in 1979.

Kemp formed his first company, Trio Linzi, performing cabaret in Europe in 1962. 'I came back to London in 1964 and immediately formed the first Lindsay Kemp Dance Company which appeared at what used to be the Little

Theatre Club in St. Martin's Lane.' (Rogers, p.16) From the start Kemp displayed an ability to 'transform himself eerily into the shape of all his characters - female or male.' (Mackrell, p.24) This characterised all of his work from then until his most recent performances. Kemp's long-term associate, David Haughton says:

'Lindsay Kemp is a man of many extraordinary parts - several of them women: Salome, the transvestite Divine, and now his latest as the *onnagata* (literally man-woman in Japanese). He is the only major figure in contemporary theatre to take cross-gender performance seriously. The British like men in female clothes, but only when they can laugh at them in the benign drag of Hinge and Bracket or the winking vulgarity of a Stanley Baxter dame. Yet Kemp's preoccupation has a long and impeccable history....outside the European theatrical tradition, across Africa and Asia where the representation of reality is more stylised, men playing women's roles are still an integral part of serious theatre. The transformation games he is playing are the child's, where fantasies are true because believed, where all identities are possible. The invitation he is extending, for anyone who wants, is simply to forget everything else and join with him in his most ancient of games.'" (Haughton, 1991)

Thew follows the history of the company and relates it to the world of popular culture and the Citizen's Theatre in Glasgow:

'It was in 1964 at the Dublin Theatre Festival, that the first Lindsay Kemp Dance Mime Company appeared, but due to lack of funds - as always - they later disbanded....In 1967, at the first of a series of recitals at the Purcell Room, London, Lindsay Kemp met David Bowie, and for about a year they worked together producing among others, Turquoise Pantomime....With an inheritance from an aunt in 1969, Lindsay Kemp moved to Edinburgh, setting up an arts centre, the Edinburgh Combination, where the first performance of Flowers was performed that September. The next year there were Happenings at the Demarco Gallery, and in 1971 Kemp was directing Genet's The Maids, his own (and Bowie's) show Legends and Buchner's Wozzeck at the Glasgow Citizen's Theatre. The Rainbow Theatre Ziggy Stardust concerts (which Kemp directed and performed in) were a feature of 1972... (Thew, p.10)



‘There are many inconsistencies between the various sources of biographical information on Lindsay Kemp,’ (Thew p.11) but the further one researches the more one realises just what a crucial influence he was - not just through his own work but as an influence and advisor to his fellow professionals, as an *eminence rose* behind so many of the risks and experiments that we are discussing.

All commentators note that cross-dressing is a characteristic of much of Kemp’s work. This was true of his production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream which was seen first in Rome in 1979 and, as with most of Kemp’s works, has been a part of the company’s repertoire ever since. Kemp says of Shakespeare’s original: ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream is the most magical of the plays, and magic for me is the all-important ingredient.’ (Rogers, p.14) He goes on to add, ‘I’m never quite sure which is dream and which is reality....my theatre knows no boundaries...’ (Rogers, p.15)

‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream is performed by the full company, some performers having double roles and some of the men playing women. There are seven named roles, five male and two female which are all played by men, plus The Lovers played by two women and two men, and the Rude Mechanicals who perform Romeo and Juliet with four performers (only one female) and Juliet is played by a man (on stilts) There is a tendency for women to be portrayed by men, both for a particular affect and because there are only three female performers in the company.’ (Thew, p.45)

What Thew says of Kemp’s work returns to the heart of the way in which cross-gender performance has been used in Britain since the sixties - as a pragmatic response to specific problems of casting from within a permanent

company, or as an underlining device to say things about the play or the production.

From Williams' As You Like It, Havergal's Hamlet and Robertson's Pericles through the period that Kemp has been touring his production of A Midsummer Night's Dream, there have been transformations in what has been permissible in society that have reflected the changes in what has been acceptable on stage. Freedom of or from theatrical convention has mirrored freedom in social convention. Kemp is an ever present figure as one charts those changes, on the boundaries between public and private, between straight theatre and rock and roll, between male and female.<sup>5</sup>

1967 and 1968 saw the dawning of an age where suddenly anything was possible, and the birth of a theatre which now permitted the previously

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<sup>5</sup> Kemp had himself played the Player Queen in the 1963 BBC television film of Hamlet at Elsinore Castle with Christopher Plummer as Hamlet. Steven Berkoff had got a part as one of the players on the strength of his mime work: 'I went back to Drury Lane [where he was living with Kemp] and told Lindsay of my huge coup. I knew they needed mimes, so I suggested that I would try and get him an interview. When I rang they were quite relieved to know I had another mime in the family and booked him unseen. I suggested that as Lindsay was *a very clever and professional mime*\* he could be the Player Queen and I would do the Player King...He (Kemp) choreographed it in Kabuki style for my role and somehow used elements from different cultures, but it made sense in a kind of Grand Guignol way with strong emphatic gestures.' (Berkoff, p.260)

\*my italics - implication that *mimetic* skill is the key to playing a woman.



impermissible - socially, sexually, legally (with the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain and the homosexual law reforms) and aesthetically. Many of the new theatre makers came not from a background of traditional drama training but from art colleges and polytechnics. By the early 70s with performance as important/legitimate a means of expression as drawing or painting or sculpture even the idea of who could be a performer had changed. But out of this 'liberation' came a whole stream of performances of Shakespeare that transformed conventions. Gender role casting was one of the conventions transformed.

Ten years after the National Theatre's As You Like It, Charles Marowitz wrote: 'It is generally accepted that today, Shakespeare can be reinterpreted for modern audiences either in the manner practised by the Royal Shakespeare and National theatre companies, or in some more flamboyant or 'loose' way as, for instance in the pop musical Two Gentlemen of Verona or Catch My Soul, the rock version of Othello.' (Marovitz, 1978 p.7)

#### BARTLETT'S TWELFTH NIGHT

By the 1980s and 90s, the alternative convention of men playing women was just one of a whole number of alternative conventions that were available to the director of a play by Shakespeare, to be used for any number of different reasons. Outside of Britain other cultural, social, political and theatrical considerations affected the representation of gender and the casting of gender.

In America, for instance, questions of ethnicity and the integration of cast arose in relation to any decisions to cross-gender cast and cross-casting was predominantly an issue of race rather than gender. In France, with its assimilation of a variety of theatrical conventions foreign to, or rare, on the British stage, from white face to theatrical forms from the former French colonies, cross-gender casting had a different historico-theatrical context. For points of comparison I have chosen to look at two further productions from outside Britain (though one by a British director): Neil Bartlett's Twelfth Night in Chicago and Ariane Mnouchkine's production of the same play in Paris.

Neil Bartlett, an openly gay director whose work as both writer and director has been centrally concerned with gay themes was able to direct Twelfth Night for the Goodman Theatre in Chicago in 1992 from a specifically gay perspective. By 1992 the range of performance conventions for the representation of gender open to Bartlett and socially and theatrically acceptable was very wide. As a result Bartlett chose to employ a variety of conventions, not restricting himself to having male actors in the female roles.

'Did we cross-cast it? We didn't cross-cast it. Shakespeare cross-cast it. I do pay a lot of attention to the historical origins of texts....The first decision to take in doing Twelfth Night is, why would you not do it as written? i.e. Why would you not do it with an all-male cast? Our first answer was that we didn't want to work with a company that was all men....We didn't really relish the prospect of being stuck in a room with twenty men. It was as simple as that. We also felt there is a problem with male to female drag, in that there is a word for it - it's drag and it's considered to have very specific connotations which are to do with male homosexuality.' (Bartlett, interview with the writer)



Bartlett did not want to be seen to be doing a 'gay' version of the play, to be trapped into the audience's expectations of what he as a 'a gay artist' would do. Neither did he feel the British drag tradition translated to America: 'it's a peculiarly British thing...the horror of drag.' (Bartlett, interview) But Bartlett is here confusing what we have seen to be two different conventions of men playing women on stage. He was also working in a country all of whose non-native theatrical traditions grew up in the past hundred years. America has no Elizabethan performance tradition. Most striking is the freedom he had to choose which conventions to work with. For Bartlett his first decision is why *not* do the play with an all-male cast. Yet only twenty-five years before the very opposite question was the one that was asked.

Bartlett felt that the nature of the play, its subject matter, made specific demands of the gender casting: 'It's about sexual confusion rather than about male homosexuality.' (Bartlett, interview) Having rejected an all male cast he then decided to do it with all women before rejecting that idea as well and finally deciding on a mixed gender cast but not cast to gender role. Viola and Sebastian were both played by young boys, who as the 'outsiders' in the play he cast as black. Only the actors playing Olivia and Maria were female actors playing female parts: 'So what you had in the piece were women playing women, which turned out to be the really difficult thing. Olivia is a drag part. The way that you play Olivia is to realise what a peculiar part it is. Not that it's one of the great authentic, genetically female roles but that it's a certain

kind of stage woman.’ (Bartlett, interview) Here Bartlett echoes the views expressed above by Robertson, Havergal and Brook, that there are female roles in Shakespeare that in some way can only be fully performed by a male actor, adding Olivia to Gertrude and Cleopatra.

The main difficulty in rehearsal was with the part of Olivia. The female actor felt that, playing a woman, she did not have the freedom that the others actors had who were playing their gender other. Bartlett felt that for the actors it was not the playing of gender that was difficult but the playing of other ‘types’: ‘If you say to most women, show me precisely how a drunk man behaves when he’s trying to kiss you, they do it like that [clicks fingers]. They’re experts on male physical behaviour. It is more difficult for an actor to play generic types rather than gender - how do you play a Lord, or a sailor, especially the characters on the fringes of the play.’ (Bartlett, interview) Bartlett felt it was easier for the female actors to play men than for the male actors to play women.: ‘Most women know what it is like to wear a suit and be sexually aggressive, whereas very few men know what it’s like to wear high heels and be sexually passive.’ (Bartlett, interview) How true this is will be seen in the next chapter.

Bartlett used facial hair for the female actors playing male characters though, ‘as soon as they opened their mouths you knew they [the female actors] weren’t men.’ (Bartlett, interview) In the reverse cross-gender casting from



that in the previously

discussed productions, Bartlett felt the need for a prosthetic equivalent - beards not breasts. Bartlett's then was a highly schematic production that viewed the 'insane whirligig of sexual choices' (Bartlett, interview) as part of the queer politics of the play: 'A woman would be playing a gay man who had fallen in love with a heterosexual girl who was being played by a boy, followed by a scene in which a heterosexual actress was playing a heterosexual woman falling in love with a girl disguised as a gay boy who in fact was being played by a straight boy.' (Bartlett, interview) For Bartlett the conventions allowed him to illuminate what he saw as the themes of the play. He also assumes a reading by the audience not only of the complexities of the gender disguise in the play but also a reading of the queer politics of the play and of the sexuality of the individual actors as well as their gender.

Bartlett's retrospective views of the play and the intentions behind his production echo the thoughts he expressed in interviews before it opened. Writing in Theatre Week (Letter from Chicago 27/1/92) Gerard Raymond put the production within the context of Bartlett's other work:

'Reversing the male drag tradition prevalent in Shakespeare's day is perhaps a logical step for Bartlett, who with his British-based company Gloria, created a richly sensuous, sexually ambiguous Sarrasine last year. Exploring the nature of dressing up and gender crossing provide the excitement and fun as well as the serious content of the company's work.' (Theatre Week, p.34)

Raymond quotes Bartlett as saying:

‘If you did Twelfth Night as it was written, as an all-male production, it would be the ‘gay’ Twelfth Night even before it opened.... The piece would be about whether the characters in the play were really homosexual and it would be about whether gay love is as good as straight love. And frankly, these are questions which are behind us. There is no gay subtext in Twelfth Night.... I think there is a gay text.’ (quoted Raymond p.34)

None of Bartlett’s intentions behind his use of gender conventions read as he intended them to do to his audience - at least to his predominantly male critics in the press. Lawrence Bonner in Windy City Times, was aware of Bartlett’s intentions:

‘In Goodman Theatre’s clumsily androgynous revival Neil Bartlett takes the play’s amorous, transvestite ambivalence to foul extremes. But they are not the ones he first announced: originally Bartlett intended it as an all-male (ie traditional) version. Perhaps because local actresses felt shut out and possibly because the enterprise might look too gay coming from a director who is openly so, he then impulsively opted for the opposite: this Twelfth Night is mainly female, a cross-casting that introduces an intrusive sexual confusion that’s stupider than it should be.... Can a living, breathing play survive this conceptual table-turning, where as Bartlett says, “identity is a joke”? *NAUGHT!* The joke, if there are any, is on the play (its poetry and power), on the character (their dignity and credibility), on the actors (*their* dignity and credibility) and, above all, on the audience, who get a crude, mean, lumbering, misanthropic, misogynistic, butchered mess palmed off on them as Shakespeare.’ (Bonner, Windy City Times, 30/1/92)

All the critics saw the production as misogynistic. Scott Collins in the Southtown Economist was typical:

‘...a smug, grotesque and misogynistic sham....the production’s runaway transsexualism and insidious hatred of women....Bartlett’s gender twist would be clever if it were not so one-sided and malicious towards women. In fact, his whole concept amounts to a mean-spirited trick on female cast members.... The result is sad and shameful, but never funny.’ (Scott Collins, Southtown Economist, 22/1/92 p.1)

Hedy Weiss in The Chicago Sun-Times was less concerned with the



production's misogyny than its failure to address the emotional truths of the play and the failure of the actors to perform their cross-casting with any conviction:

'The production ...is visually stunning but it is also linguistically botched, sexually ineffectual and emotionally vacant....And by the end it has sucked the heart and soul out of Shakespeare's deft and complex comedy about the strange shapes that love can sometimes assume. Bartlett's production also employs a wholesale gender change that makes very little sense, and whose only real appeal turns out to be that it gives local audiences a chance to see familiar actresses testing their skills at drag.... Yet male and female is not really the issue here. Shakespeare's plays have endured because of their miraculous exploration of human relationships. And at the Goodman, not a single human connection of any kind is ever forged.' (Hedy Weiss, Chicago Sun-Times, 21/1/92)

If Bartlett had a clear concept in his use of cross-gender it was lost on all who wrote about the production: 'The roles have been assigned with little regard for gender.... the show is such an undisciplined mess that instead of a concept, he ended up with a free-for-all.' (Tom Vales, Daily Herald, 22/1/92, p.6) The other aspect of cross-casting in the show, the use of black actors which had seemed so important to Bartlett, was noticed by only one critic and that only in passing:

'The play's subtitle, after all, is What You Will and since two major themes of the comedy are the confusion of the sexes and the alienation of strangers in a foreign land, it makes some kind of sense to cast most of the male roles with females and to use two young black actors to portray the castaway twins who find themselves at lose in the white man's world of Illyria.... On a small stage, on a small budget, in small theater, it might work. Not here, however.' (Richard Christiansen, Chicago Tribune, 21/1/92, p.16)

It is Bartlett's failure to understand the dominant conventions within which he

was working in Chicago, far from home, that was in part at least responsible for the critical failure of the production. The black casting, which back in Britain might have meant so much, passed virtually unnoticed, while the gender casting done from the perspective of a man used to working within the limited confines of London 'queer' theatre, said all the wrong things to Chicago audiences who found what they read to be misogyny in the production offensive. The only kind words about the production came from Sherman Kaplan on WBBM Newsradio:

‘I think the way to approach this production is to do so as did its producer, with an open mind and view that this is an entertainment, not a classroom exercises....[The Goodman’s casting] is a device that, aside from underscoring a sense of androgyny about the proceedings, adds to the humour, some of which comes directly from Shakespeare, some of which does not.’ (Sherman Kaplan, WBBM Newsradio, 27/1/92)

#### MNOUCHKINE’S TWELFTH NIGHT

Ariane Mnouchkine had directed Twelfth Night ten years previously in a production for her Théâtre du Soleil which had used cross-casting with a female actor Clémentine Yelnick in the male role of Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Mnouchkine’s casting decision was, like Havergal’s had been, largely a practical one, as she was keen to find a way to redress the balance of casting within the company which had left Yelnick without a part in Richard II.

Théâtre du Soleil is a collective, albeit one led strongly by Mnouchkine as its



artistic director. At the time of the company's Shakespeare cycle in 1982 Mnouchkine discussed the idea of the collective and her place within it: 'Collective means that everybody is concerned with everything. This has been ignored a little over the years.... But with the Shakespeare project we have begun to work collectively again.' (interview with Jean-Paul Liégois, 'Je mets Shakespeare devant tous les autres, même Molière', Le Nouveau Figaro Magazine No. 1, Feb 1982, quoted Kiernander, p.12)

The Twelfth Night was a production by a company where, according to Kiernander, despite the fact that:

'the male actors... are privileged in terms of both the number and the importance of the roles they have to play....within the functioning of the group itself a *de facto* feminist practice operates, where there is no discrimination against any member of the troupe on the grounds of sex, and where women are both able and required to compete on equal terms with the men. The sex of the company members has ceased, as much as possible, to be an issue.' (Kiernander, p.15)

But there is an inherent contradiction here. A company playing Shakespeare without using any cross-gender casting will have an inherent *structural* discrimination against women because the vast majority of the rôles are male. Théâtre du Soleil had a radical cross-cultural and colour-blind casting policy that had eliminated discrimination on racial grounds but had yet to apply this radicalism to its gender casting. A company celebrated for its use of theatrical techniques and conventions from a variety of cultures, a multi-cultural synthesis of eastern and western theatrical practice and run by a noted

feminist, was still one in which the majority of the actors and the best of the roles, were male.

Théâtre du Soleil's first Shakespeare had been a production of A Midsummer Night's Dream in 1968, a production strongly influenced by Jan Kott's view of the play as expressed in Shakespeare our Contemporary. (Kiernander, p.59)

In 1981 the company embarked on a cycle of plays, intending to stage ten, reducing that to six and eventually staging three, the first of which was Richard II, followed by Twelfth Night and then Henry IV, Part I. For Twelfth Night Mnouchkine's original plan had been to have all the parts played by female actors and this is what happened in the early rehearsals. But as we saw in Robertson's Pericles what can seem a good idea before rehearsals start can prove impossible in rehearsals themselves. So rehearsals stopped and restarted with just one central piece of cross-casting, Clementine Yelnick as Sir Andrew Aguecheek. In an interview later Mnouchkine said that the original idea had been motivated by her wish to make full use of all the actors in the company in the cycle of plays. What she found in rehearsal was that an all-female cast: 'destroyed the subtle balance of a play depending so heavily on transvestism and on the explicit differentiation between male and female.' (quoted Fabienne Pascaud, *Télérama*, 7/7/82) Quoting from an interview Mnouchkine gave to *Marie Claire* (April 1986), Kiernander is of the opinion that:

'Mnouchkine finds female actors more difficult to work with. She believes that in Western society it is more difficult for a woman to act



than for a man. She claims that women are educated to be both reserved and seductive, which stops them being free with their bodies, natural, 'naked'. They are taught to perform sexual clichés and to daub themselves with psychological lipstick.' (Kiernander, p.117)

Interviewed by Armelle Héliot when the production opened, Mnouchkine said of giving up the original all-female casting that, 'it was very painful, but it was better to make a clean break, rather than stubbornly persist on an unproductive path. It was very traumatic for the group spirit of the company.' (Le Quotidien de Paris, 17/7/82)

Mnouchkine's production shows yet again the pragmatic reasoning behind a director's decision to make use of single gender casting in a Shakespeare play but this time with three differences. Firstly that the pragmatism was superseded in rehearsal by a different pragmatism when casting confronted play on the floor of the rehearsal room. This is the only example where the idea has been abandoned. Interestingly it is the only example where the single gender of the cast was female and where the director too was female. Which links in to the second difference, Mnouchkine's belief that the gender issues inherent in the play itself, what she calls, 'the dependence on transvestism' makes the play unworkable with a single gender cast. Finally, Mnouchkine, a woman director, brings in the notion of the differing capabilities between male actors and female actors, believing female actors, because of their social conditioning as women, to be *less* capable actors than men. This from a woman who has always surrounded herself primarily with male actors. This

argument will be picked up again below (Chapter 7) in which the research with actors will show that it may be a question of *difference* not superiority or inferiority. These two latter points are crucial in any attempt to understand how an actor portrays gender and how it is perceived by the audience. Mnouchkine believes that there are limitations in both these issues and that they are related to social constructs and conventions. These ideas will be explored in the workshops and experiments with actors and audiences in the coming chapters.

Mnouchkine's trademark with Théâtre du Soleil has always been her use of oriental performing traditions and conventions, largely from the French colonies, in her work. Within the traditions which inform all her work, the gender of the actor and the representation of gender are very different from British traditions. Her Twelfth Night was set in a world of Eastern theatre: 'Ariane Mnouchkine installe 'la Nuit des Rois' dans une Inde de son rêve. Elle a ses raisons que ma raison ignore. Qu'importe; et, après tout, pourquoi pas?' (Jean-Jacques Gautier, Le Figaro Magazine, 18th November 1982)

Working within such conventions the gender of the actor can become irrelevant, or differently relevant. It was mentioned by none of the reviews of the production. The reviews did pick up on what they saw as the homosexuality of the text. Remember that France does not have the same history of theatrical convention that the British have. In France the history is not of an all-male stage in the 16th century but rather one of actors of two



genders when England had only the male actor. This different history of performance convention would account for the attitude of some of the French reviewers who saw Twelfth Night as a gay play. Le Matin sent an anonymous 'envoyée spéciale à Avignon' who took exception to what she saw as the homosexuality of the play. She calls Olivia's reaction on first meeting Viola (as Cesario) early in the play as the, 'premiere touche d'homosexualité, ce n'est pas la dernière.' (Le Matin 13th July 1982)

The British critic, Michael Ratcliffe, bringing with him all the prejudices that came with his own expectations of theatrical convention took great exception to the production when he saw it in Paris, 'The idea of Twelfth Night as a Chinese acrobat play is perverse nonsense, eliminating the play's sexuality, reducing the comic characters to comic types and perpetuating their scenes to exhaustion....' Yet Ratcliffe was able to admire the adoption of non-European theatrical conventions in the production: 'Mnouchkine displays an eclectic enthusiasm for world cultural sources - Islamic, Mughal, Indonesian, Chinese and Japanese to name only the most obvious - wholly outside the experience or curiosity, alas, of most British directors.' (Michael Ratcliffe, The Observer, 1st April 1984) The phrase 'wholly outside the experience of' is crucial. Other French critics had not regarded the production as without sexuality, rather the reverse with the word 'ambiguïté' constantly used to describe the sexuality of the production and the performances. Yes Ratcliffe, unused, unlike his French colleagues to the conventions adopted by Mnouchkine, saw them as

‘eliminating’ the sexuality in the play. As with the critical response to Williams’ As You Like It and Bartlett’s Twelfth Night, the production is viewed through the conventions the critic is familiar with. Director and critic are at odds because both have different understandings of the conventions they are using - in Williams’ case cross-gender, in Bartlett’s cross-racial. With theatrical conventions outside the experience of the audience, the spectator will not be able to read or understand the representation of gender in front of him.

#### THE DIRECTOR’S VIEW

All the directors above have used cross-dressing in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons, from the schematic experiment of Clifford Williams’ As You Like It at the National Theatre in 1967 via Giles Havergal’s ‘practical and aesthetic’ cross-cast Hamlet and Toby Robertson’s brothel set Pericles to Neil Bartlett’s gay exposition of Twelfth Night in Chicago in 1992. All share the general opinion that using male actors in the female roles can be useful, even essential as Jan Kott argued, to fully illuminate a Shakespeare text in performance. And all have drawn conclusions about the representation of gender in Shakespeare’s own day as a result of their experience of directing the plays.

Of them all, it is only Clifford Williams the director who reintroduced the



Elizabethan convention of men playing the female roles, who lacks enthusiasm about its use and is the most sceptical about its possibilities today.

His view of whether one could repeat his experiment with another Shakespeare play is:

‘On my experience of that, you can take a chance and do anything you’ve got a mind to do really. It might work or it might not. If someone says it’s going to be an all-female production of Lear, so be it. You can do it with trained monkeys if you like. I don’t think I would ever, ever want to do that again because I could see no reason then. I enjoyed doing it. One found there was a sort of good result. From my angle it’s a sort of one-off situation. I would find it perverse. For me. But not for someone else. Looking at it 27 years later one would have to debate much more profoundly what one was up to, doing something like that today. Because on the surface at any rate, serious changes have taken place in society which one would have to take into account. I’m sure we didn’t think we were naïve. We probably thought we were fearfully sophisticated...I think there was a naïveté. We would be naïve because we weren’t aware of the currents [of feminism] which were around but not yet developed.’ (Williams, interview)

Williams says, ‘We weren’t trying to say anything,’ but acknowledges that one could not do the same experiment today without being seen to be saying something because of what he calls, ‘the serious changes that have taken place in society’: changing social conventions affecting change in theatrical convention. And his view of the men who played the female parts within Shakespeare’s own company? ‘Maybe the whole thing was a paedophile’s delight? Were the boys who played girls fucked soundly by the rest of the company or not?’ (Williams, interview) Williams feels it impossible to imagine what the productions can have been like in Shakespeare’s day and would be fascinated to see a modern production using boys - but wonders how

acceptable this would be and what an audience would read into it.

Bartlett, from a gay perspective, as we have seen believes that: 'If you did Twelfth Night as it was written, as an all-male production, it would be the 'gay' Twelfth Night even before it opened.' (Neil Bartlett, quoted in Raymond p.34) In the same length of time, thirty years, that it took for women to replace men on the English stage, men have regained permission, socially and theatrically, to take on women's roles. Bartlett's views would have been unthinkable to those working on As You Like It at the Old Vic. So it is that just as the revolutionary becomes the commonplace, so the counter-revolutionary becomes commonplace. But to what extent does acceptance of cross-gender performance have its limitations still? And how confined is such acceptance to the plays of Shakespeare? For Giles Havergal there are no boundaries: 'I still think, if you've got a very good actor who can play it [the part] in drag, play it.' So a male Hedda Gabler? 'Yes, if that was what you wanted to do. I mean, you'd have to have a damn good reason because it would be extremely perverse. And you don't have the academic backup which you do with Shakespeare, that it was related in some way to what was intended. I believe exactly the same things about ethnic casting. I suppose I'm kind of blind to it because of working in opera. It really doesn't bother me. I think you've got to be careful that you don't disrupt the audiences. If you make the audience think, 'but that can't be true', and it niggles with them, then you've failed. I think the more naturalistic you get the



more of a problem it becomes.’ Vocal and physical skills, for Havergal, transcend race, gender or age. ‘The average member of the audience shouldn’t be disturbed by it. I think if they come out thinking why is Julia black and her parents are white, you’ve lost.’ (Havergal, interview)

The key issues here then are, as we saw at the National in 1967, academic support and audience acceptance of conventions. Toby Robertson believes that an audience will accept whatever convention it is given ‘very, very quickly.’ But he also believes that ‘a sort of spice’ can be given to the plays where characters are ‘disguised’ such as Twelfth Night and As You Like It. Robertson points to two very different possibilities with cross-gender casting. One is that it can be ‘blind’ or ‘neutral’; that the audience will simply accept the convention and go along with it throughout the performance. The other is that in those plays where gender disguise is a feature of the plot, the use of cross-gender casting can be drawn attention to by the production to add an extra layer of ambiguity to what is shown on stage.

Toby Robertson has himself since directed a cross-dressed Hamlet and he echoes many of Havergal’s sentiments in talking about that production at Theater Clwyd where his Gertrude was played by a man, but not his Ophelia because:

‘I could not find a boy who I thought could play Ophelia, so I ended up with a male Gertrude and a female Ophelia, albeit quite a boyish sort of Ophelia. But it did make the closet scene very, very brutal which I think it has to be..... I think there is an awful lot to be said for it because one is always having to say

to the actresses anyway, remember there is something manly, I don't mean masculine, something manly [about these characters]. I've just done Macbeth in Israel and again I kept feeling, I wish this [Lady Macbeth] was being played by a man. But there is no tradition, hardly, of doing it.' (Robertson, interview)

We have looked at that lack of tradition in the previous chapter. Robertson does remember productions at the Marlowe Society where female roles (Calpurnia and Portia) were taken by school boys, 'and it was incredibly moving. There's something very vulnerable about young boys playing these women.' (Robertson, interview) Robertson argues that having a boy or a man play the female rôle paradoxically allows the character to be more vulnerable in the violence of the scenes with Hamlet. He thought this true of Havergal's Hamlet. 'There is a feeling on stage that men don't like pushing women about....It certainly allowed that scene [the closet scene] to move into an area of physical lack of control that I don't think one would have done with a woman.' (Robertson, interview) Robertson also argues that, 'Cleopatra must have been played much more in the Japanese Noh tradition. It cannot have been played by a boy....Ophelia can have been played by a boy, but I would swear Gertrude must have been played by a man; someone who had gone through the company and was still playing female roles.' (Robertson, interview) Cleopatra, Gertrude, Olivia and Ophelia, and as we shall see later, Juliet and Lady Capulet, all present challenges in performance which directors believe reflect on what must have been performance practice in Shakespeare's time.

Robertson diverges from Havergal in arguing that there are important



limitations to what is possible. That it cannot work in Ibsen, say. Because the actor's job is 'to encapsulate three different voices, those of the character, of the actor (him or herself) and of the author. I really think that there has to be that understanding of what the author's intention was.' In Ibsen he argues, 'it just would not be possible.' (Robertson, interview) Robertson feels that many productions of Macbeth fail today because directors seek to include, 'a sort of femininity into the role [of Macbeth] which, in a sense, isn't there.' (Robertson, interview) Neil Bartlett, who has used cross-gender casting in a numerous non-Shakespeare productions - most extensively in Sarasine - makes another point: 'Whenever you do it, you have to do it with reference to the British stage tradition. The notion of 'the Dame' is a constant resource....The tradition is huge and various, and I love it. And I love the way in which it keeps on cropping up in all the most unexpected places.' (Bartlett, interview) The Dame, of course, is a tradition in which the cross-gender draws constant attention to itself. It is the drag tradition. There is nothing neutral about a pantomime dame.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The issue of integrated racial casting is more complicated for Bartlett, who having just taken over the running of a large civic theatre, The Lyric Hammersmith, when I interviewed him, had his attitudes coloured by that responsibility as well as by his Chicago experience' 'It is not enough to say, I will use non-white performers as and when I see fit....Certain kinds of art, I don't think have any social obligations....If you're running a Borough funded theatre then you can't put on white performers twelve months of the year, because you are to some degree...accountable to your audience.' (Bartlett, interview)

Bartlett believes that an audience will bring an awareness of the sexuality of the actor to their views of the part they are playing. This is a recent development. The sexuality of an actor was not a matter of public knowledge or discussion in the sixties. But Bartlett cites the example of Michael Cashman, a well-known, openly gay actor, famous for the first gay screen kiss on a British television soap, Eastenders, who in playing in The Merchant of Venice in Leeds (West Yorkshire Playhouse) would have been seen as a 'gay' actor by the audience and hence their view of the character would have been coloured. It is surely questionable as to whether this is generally true, as it is very rare for an audience to bring any outside knowledge of an actor's sexuality to bear on the performance they see, though if an actor is well known (as Cashman was) for a role where sexuality was important, they might bring some preconception through their knowledge of that character. I will deal with this in some detail in the audience experiment below.

For the American academic Marjorie Garber, the representation of gender is at the very heart of what theatre is all about:

'Thus the transvestite in Shakespeare - both the boy actor and the cross-dressed woman - becomes not an accident of historical contingency but the necessary intervention that makes fetishism not only possible but foundational to theatre itself. We might note that when the English stage ceases, after the restoration, to be a transvestite theater - when actresses appear on the public stage in roles previously reserved for men - their appearance coincides with the redesign of the playhouse to include the Italian innovation of the front curtain. The curtain is a veil that marks off the 'not real' from the 'real'. The work done by transvestism in putting the phallus under erasure is now done by a different kind of theatrical punctuation. The one substitutes for the other - the curtain for the transvestite troupe, both marking



theatrical difference. The phallus only does its work when veiled: veiled by the difference of not knowing whether there is a difference or not (since 'having' and 'lacking' can both be kinds of 'seeming'); veiled by the curtain that says, 'this (and only this?) is theater.' Or to put it another way, the substitution of female actresses for boy actors is not a naturalizing move that returns theatre to its desired condition of mimesis, replacing the false boy with the real woman. Instead it is a double substitution - a re-recognition of artifice - something tacitly acknowledged by Restoration critics when they praised the women for playing almost as well as the boy actresses did...' (Garber, p.126)

From the moment in 1660 when the first actress stepped on the public stage in London until 1967 when her place was no longer assured, the English stage was controlled by rigid conventions unknown before and constantly challenged since. A theatre where men played men and women played women; where the dominant conventions were those of gender congruent representation; and where the audience was secured behind the forth wall of the proscenium arch.<sup>7</sup> For those 300 hundred years, only the pantomime dame was there, once a year, to remind the audience of what was once and what yet might be again.

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<sup>7</sup> The leading exponent of Theatre-in-the-Round in England (having been influenced by developments in the USA where Margo Jones and others had been establishing the idea of Theatres-in-the-Round in the 1950s) was Stephen Joseph who was the first Fellow of the Drama Department of Manchester University when it was opened in 1962. He had formed a Sunday Society in 1955 to present plays 'in the round' and founded the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent. His book Theatre-in-the-Round was published in 1955 and his New Theatre Forms, advocating the end of the proscenium arch, in 1968.

## CHAPTER 5

The research so far has given us a variety of assumptions about cross-gender casting based primarily on opinions derived by directors from their own experiences and observations. It is clear that this analysis raises as many questions as it answers. The act of playing cross-gender on the stage gives us a window onto the very business of acting itself and a link to the way in which the plays of Shakespeare might have been acted when they were first staged. As we have noted above, we can know what Shakespeare's audience watched but cannot so easily know what it was that they saw. The evidence from Pepys and his contemporaries is that, after the Restoration at least, there could sometimes be a gap between what was shown and what was seen, a gap occasioned by the change in stage convention that the appearance of the first actress in 1660 brought about. With the re-opening of the theatres there could be no return to the *status quo ante*. Just as the change in convention for the presentation of gender on stage in the late seventeenth century gives us a glimpse into what audiences perceive, so the loosening of that convention in the late twentieth century gives us an opportunity for a closer examination of audience perception and the whole issue of gender representation.

For Havergal, Williams, *et al*, it is the job of a director to establish the convention of gender representation within which a performance will be given. It is their belief that an audience will accept these conventions if they



are established strongly enough at the start of the play. But whether this is true or not, the abandonment in 1967, however partial, of a central convention of the stage of drama on the British stage that had governed for more than three hundred years, profoundly affected what was permissible on the British stage. Williams' production of As You Like It did not mark a return to the androcentric stage of the pre-Restoration, but it did mark the beginning of a stage that could no longer be assumed to be androgyno- or hetero- centric. The stages with all-male casts, with all-female casts, with gender blind casts, with openly and specifically homosexual casts, all began to play their part in the development of theatrical forms in Britain.

The gradual abandonment of the dominant convention in the representation of gender poses a series of questions about acting and about spectating. In summary they are:

1. How does an actor create the representation of gender on stage? For Shakespeare's actors, just as for actors this century pre 1967, there was a clear convention and a strong performance tradition within which to work. The issue of playing gender simply did not arise. Post 1967 the issue must arise in any production of a Shakespeare play because, as Bartlett says above, a choice about gender casting is implicit in any production.

2. How does an actor relate the representation of the gender of a character

they are playing to their personal gender construct? As we have seen, and as I will show more fully later, gender, as distinct from biological sex, is a social construct (Archer & Lloyd, Kessler & McKenna *passim*) that a modern actor, unlike his or her predecessor, must to some extent be conscious of constructing. An actor must therefore take their own gender construct, what Bem calls their Gender Schema (Bem, *passim*) into account in building a character in performance. Despite Archer & Lloyd's complaint that, 'Psychologists often look for differences between men as a group and women as a group without taking into account the wide range of variation among individuals of the same sex....[and that] the publication policies of psychology journals contribute to the emphasis on differences and the neglect of similarities,' (Archer & Lloyd, pps. 6/7), Gender Schema Theory, while based on socially perceived notions of difference, allows for the finding of similarities within individuals; that all individuals are to some degree androgynous - a mixture of male and female. Just as acting theory can allow for all actors to have within them, or at their call, all the elements that can make up a character. Is a perfect actor then a perfect androgyne, containing every gender possibility?

3. How does the creation of gender by an actor relate to the conventions being used in a production? The establishment of a convention at the beginning of the rehearsal process provides one of a number of possible different challenges, possible approaches to the acting process of the actors in that



production.

Henley makes the point that,

‘...our culture places great emphasis on verbal communication [but] the fact that we’re never formally tutored in nonverbal communication doesn’t mean everybody doesn’t know that looks and postures mean something, perhaps everything, especially in emotion-charged situations...It [non-verbal communication] becomes the yardstick against which words and intentions are measured.’ (Henley, p.7)

Henley may be appearing to state the obvious, but the lack of conscious cognition of the learning process as against unconscious cognition presents serious problems for the actor in the adoption of suitable gender-related body language in playing a cross-gender part. How does this work for the male actor playing Rosalind? To what extent does the conscious, perceptive mind dominate the unconscious intuitive mind that might be responsible for an actor’s responses in a non-gender-changed role? Put simply in terms of the most basic of acting problems, does ‘what do I do with my hands?’ become a different question when playing cross-gender than when playing gender-true?

4. What are the artistic possibilities and practical difficulties for director, actor and audience offered by cross-gender casting? The first Shakespeare production with an all-male cast in over three hundred years, came at the beginning of what we have seen to be an exponential growth in alternative theatrical forms. In the light of this, how does the use of cross-gender casting demonstrate the range of possibilities available to those involved, as

director, actor and spectator to the theatrical process?

5. What limits, if any, are there on an audience's acceptance of stage conventions of the representation of gender and how does this relate to social conventions of the representation of gender? In a world in which a woman "wearing that which pertianeth unto a man, and a man putting on a woman's garments" is no longer seen as "an abomination unto the Lord" (Deuteronomy) and in which such things are as common off stage as on, is an audience able to accept any convention in the representation of gender on stage or are some more acceptable than others? With no sumptuary laws and very relaxed sumptuary codes, does it matter to an audience whether male actors or female actors play female roles? Or vice versa?

In addressing these five questions I will also seek answers to the two fundamental questions which are at the heart of all the discussion of gender in performance, namely:

- what does an audience see? and
- how does an actor create what an audience is shown?

The next part of the thesis examines these issues through a series of workshops and controlled experiments with actors and with audiences. Workshops were held with student actors at Middlesex University and professional actors at London's Actors Centre. (Chapter 6)



Gender Schema Theory, described in detail below, was used to analyse the building of character gender by professional actors in a production of Twelfth Night and relate that to the gender schemas of the actors themselves. (Chapter 7)

A controlled experiment with audiences was undertaken in which a scene from Hamlet was played with a variety of different gender-casting conventions being used to examine the way in which audiences respond to different conventions. (Chapter 8)

## CHAPTER 6

The purposes of the workshops as outlined in the original research proposal were:

- 1) To investigate the artistic possibilities and practical difficulties for actor, director and audience offered by cross-gender casting.
- 2) To evaluate the opportunities presented by such casting and its effect in performance.

My theoretical starting point was my own belief (before embarking on this research), that the gender of an actor was not the principle factor in their casting in the plays of Shakespeare. What mattered was finding the actor best able to assume the rôle irrespective of their gender. The actor best able to reach the essence of the character, an essence that might have little to do with their gender. This was a belief that had informed all my productions of Shakespeare plays. This belief had been modified by my research into the use of gender casting conventions on the Shakespearean stage and the experiences and opinions of the directors interviewed who had worked with cross-gender cast productions.

I began workshops with actors believing that:

1. In performing the plays of Shakespeare the casting of the 'base gender' of an actor to the 'base gender' of the character is not a primary requirement.
2. Casting gender of actor to gender of character can be counter-productive to



the presentation of the dramatic 'truth' of a scene.

3 That the true nature of the violence in a scene in a play by Shakespeare can be reduced, even suppressed and hidden, by the failure to cross cast.

4. All gender is in part an accumulation of performances learnt and developed for social and personal use which have to be abandoned or modified for the successful representation on stage of any character whatever their gender.

Schlemmer talked of the history of theatre as being, 'the history of the transfiguration of the human form. It is the history of *man* as the actor of physical and spiritual events, ranging from naïveté to reflection, from naturalness to artifice.' (Schlemmer p.17) Garber too, as we have seen, postulates that *all* drama is a question of representation, and that representing a character of a different gender is no different in essence from any other form of dramatic presentation. Some, especially those working in the field of Queer

Theory<sup>1</sup>, take the argument further:

‘The distinction masculine/feminine is purely social, based on the oppression of women and on what is now an historically obsolete sexual division of labour. The category masculine is therefore a wholly reactionary one. The fact that no *individual* can choose to live outside the social system of gender, and that all of us therefore participate in masculinity/femininity, does not remove this reactionary context.’  
(Gough, p.120)

Gough is moving close to the ideas postulated by many psychologists who believe, as I have argued above, that all gender is a matter of performance. I would argue that the research so far, and my own experience as a director in the field of cross-cast performance, indicates that biological sex and sexuality or sexual preference (neither of which are matters of choice) are seen through the masks of gender that are open to construction by the individual. The purpose of the experimental work and the workshops with actors was to find out if this was true, and if this was the case what particular challenges, problems, opportunities the representation of gender presents to an actor

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<sup>1</sup> The term Queer Theory was coined for a conference ‘on theorizing lesbian and gay sexualities’ that was held at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in February 1990. For Teresa de Lauretis who invented the phrase, it was a way of marking ‘a certain critical distance’ from the term ‘gay and lesbian’ in an attempt to ‘deconstruct our own discourses’ and to show that ‘gay sexuality in its specific female and male cultural (or subcultural) forms acts as an agency of social process whose mode of functioning is both interactive and yet resistant, both participatory and yet distinct, claiming at once equality and difference, demanding political representation while insisting on its material and historical specificity.’ (de Lauretis, pps iii-iv) This reappropriation of a term of abuse empowered a whole new approach to the study of male and female homosexuality. By 1993 it was possible for Patrick Higgins to publish A Queer Reader which saw the history of the world, from ‘Antiquity’ to ‘The Golden Age’, in ‘Queer’ terms, albeit from a male point of view.



today; how these challenges correspond to the challenges presented to an Elizabethan actor; what we might learn about Elizabethan performance practice; and perhaps most importantly what we can learn from an investigation into the performance of gender about the nature and mechanism of acting itself.

Does an actor have to construct gender on stage whatever their own gender and the gender of the part they are playing? Much recent work by cultural and literary critics makes use of this idea of the ‘construction of gender and the constructedness (rather than the naturalness, literality, biology, or essence) of male and female as culturally marked categories.’ (Garber p.47) We shall return to this when we look at psychological measurements of gender and at the measurement of gender according to gender schema theory. But if gender is a ‘construct’, then can *any* actor construct *any* gender? How do they do this? Does their own ‘construct’ of gender help or hinder that construction?<sup>2</sup> What then is the nature of that representation ? How literal should it be? How detailed should the construction of gender be? What are the factors, elements

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<sup>2</sup>Representation can be symbolic as well as realistic. One Lord Cornbury, Governor of the Royal Provinces of New York and New Jersey from 1702 - 1708 dressed as a woman. He justified his transvestism by saying that, as Queen Anne’s relative and representative, he should *represent* her as literally as possible: ‘You are very stupid not to see the propriety of it. In this place and particularly on this occasion [the opening of the Provincial Assembly] I represent a woman and ought in all respects to represent her as faithfully as I can.’ (quoted in Glenberrie, p.77)

of that construction? How do they compare and compete with other aspects of the construction of the character? How large a factor is *gender* in the construction of *character*? Can one create/construct/represent a character without separately creating/constructing/representing a gender? These then were the issues that I set out to explore in a series of workshops with actors. The initial workshops were with professional actors at The Actors Centre in London and with student actors at Middlesex University. They were later followed up with further workshops with professional actors at The Actors Centre.

#### ACTORS CENTRE WORKSHOPS 1

The first series of workshops took place over four weeks at the Actors Centre in Central London. The Actors Centre is 'London's professional base for performers' and runs an ongoing programme of workshops and classes for professional (ie Equity member) actors. Running the first workshops there enabled me to find a *self-selected* group of professional actors, none of whom had worked with me before and who would come to the workshops without previous experience of playing cross-gender. The classes were advertised in The Actors Centre programme as:

'exploring approaches to the increasingly common phenomenon of cross-gender casting in Shakespeare - from the work of Glasgow Citizens Theatre to Cheek by Jowl's As You Like It and Neil Bartlett's Twelfth Night. The classes will give female actors the opportunity to explore leading male character and male actors to explore female



roles, as well as looking at challenges presented to the actor by the complexities of sexual disguise within the comedies where women are forever pretending to be men.' (Actors Centre Programme Jan/Feb/Mar 1995)

A maximum of 14 participants was set for the workshop series. 11 actors registered of whom 3 were men and 8 were women. One of the men dropped out before the workshops started.

### Workshop One

The aim of the workshop was to introduce the playing of cross-gender moving to its use in Shakespeare in the second half of the session.

We began with a warm-up which led to the group walking around the room on an imaginary grid, neutralising themselves and the room. The actors were asked to greet each other as they came into contact whilst walking, until they had met everyone in the room.

Remaining on 'the grid' the actors were then asked to slowly become, as they walked, a 90 year old person of the opposite sex. The idea was that by tackling 2 attributes at the same time they would avoid the most obvious stereotyping of either age or gender. As they moved they were encouraged to explore how the changes of gender and age affected every part of their body - limbs, joints, breathing, pain, movement in the space.

Now the actors were asked to greet each other again. How do the changes affect attitude, voice, the physicality of greeting?

Having done this they were asked to gradually let the transformations slip away and become themselves again.

The next change as they moved was one of just gender. After the previous transformation which had been extreme, this should have been a much more subtle process.

Again the actors were encouraged to explore how the change affected the different parts of the body, how they moved, how they related to the space, how their physical 'attitude' was altered. The slow change during the course of movement allowed a degree of mimetic morphing.

Again the actors were then asked to greet each other in the room and see where the differences lay.

The actors were then asked to sit at the side of the space and from that starting point improvise an office party. Anyone could enter and leave the space at any time but all the actors had to act their 'gender other' - men playing women, women playing men.

After the improvisation the actors were asked to relax and discuss the work to that point.

The consensus amongst the actors was:

- It was easier to play age than gender.
- It was easier for the women to play men than for the men to play women.  
(even though the journey for the actor covers the same distance).
- It was difficult to avoid falling into stereotypes and generalities. But was there, the actors wondered, an essential truth in the generalities adopted?



- There was a strong feeling that different sexes filled the space in different ways.
- The men (whether male actors or female actors as men) seemed ‘bigger’, ‘wider’, ‘more rooted’ ‘more confrontational’, ‘held themselves differently’, ‘were immediately competitive’.
- The men playing women felt immediately threatened in the office improvisation.

After a break we moved on to two Shakespeare texts.

Text 1: King John, Act V Scene 2, Lines 78 - 108

Lewis The Dauphin and Cardinal Pandulph.

PANDULPH

Hail, noble prince of France!  
 The next is this: King John hath reconcil'd  
 Himself to Rome; his spirit is come in,  
 That so stood out against the holy Church,  
 The great metropolis and see of Rome.  
 Therefore thy threat'ning colours now wind up  
 And tame the savage spirit of wild war,  
 That, like a lion fostered up at hand,  
 It may lie gently at the foot of peace  
 And be no further harmful than in show.

LEWIS

Your Grace shall pardon me, I will not back:  
 I am too high-born to be propertied,  
 To be a secondary at control,  
 Or useful serving-man and instrument  
 To any sovereign state throughout the world.  
 Your breath first kindled the dead coal of wars  
 Between this chastis'd kingdom and myself  
 And brought in matter that should feed this fire;  
 And now 'tis far too huge to be blown out  
 With that same weak wind which enkindled it.  
 You taught me how to know the face of right,  
 Acquainted me with interest to this land,  
 Yea, thrust this enterprise into my heart;  
 And come ye now to tell me John hath made  
 His peace with Rome? What is that peace to me?  
 I, by the honour of my marriage-bed,  
 After young Arthur, claim this land for mine;  
 And, now it is half-conquer'd, must I back  
 Because that John hath made his peace with Rome?

Am I Rome's slave? What penny hath Rome borne,  
 What men provided, what munition sent,  
 To underprop this action? Is 't not I  
 That undergo this charge? Who else but I,  
 And such as to my claim are liable,  
 Sweat in this business and maintain this war?  
 Have I not heard these islanders shout out  
 'Vive le roi!' as I have bank'd their towns?  
 Have I not here the best cards for the game  
 To will this easy match, play'd for a crown?  
 And shall I now give o'er the yielded set?  
 No, no, on my soul, it never shall be said.

The scene was played in pairs. After comments from the group another pair took over. The pairings were all of female actors until the final pair who were the two men in the group. The major observations of the group were that it was difficult to hold onto the work done in the earlier improvisations when working on a character, that generalities of gender gave way to detail and specifics of character even though the character of the Dauphin was within the scene exhibiting what could be seen as stereotypical behaviour, that he was, as some commented, 'very male'.

#### Text 2: Macbeth Act 1, scene 5, Lines 1 - 75

Though short this is an entire scene: Lady Macbeth's first appearance in the play, when a servant brings in a letter from her husband telling of the prophesy of the witches. Macbeth himself then enters.

#### LADY MACBETH

"They met me in the day of success, and I have learned by the perfectest report they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burned in desire to question them further, they made themselves air, into which they vanished. Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it, came missives from the King, who all-hailed me 'Thane of Cawdor'; by which title, before, these weird sisters saluted me and referred me to the coming on of time with 'Hail, King that shalt be!' This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell."

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be  
 What thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature.



It is too full o' the milk of human kindness  
 To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great;  
 Art not without ambition, but without  
 The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,  
 That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,  
 And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'ldst have, great Glamis,  
 That which cries, "Thus thou must do, if thou have it;  
 And that which rather thou dost fear to do  
 Than wishest should be undone." Hie thee hither,  
 That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,  
 And chastise with the valor of my tongue  
 All that impedes thee from the golden round,  
 Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem  
 To have thee crown'd withal.

*Enter a Messenger.*

What is your tidings?

MESSENGER

The King comes here tonight.

LADY MACBETH Thou'rt mad to say it!

Is not thy master with him? who, were't so,

Would have inform'd for preparation.

MESSENGER

So please you, it is true; our Thane is coming.

One of my fellows had the speed of him,

Who, almost dead for breath, had scarcely more

Than would make up his message.

LADY MACBETH

Give him tending; He brings great news.

*Exit Messenger.*

The raven himself is hoarse

That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan

Under my battlements. Come, you spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here

And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full

Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,

Stop up the access and passage to remorse,

That no compunctious visitings of nature

Shake my fell purpose nor keep peace between

The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,

And take my milk for gall, your murdering ministers,

Wherever in your sightless substances

You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,

And pall thee in the dunest smoke of hell

That my keen knife see not the wound it makes

Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark

To cry, "Hold, hold!"

*Enter Macbeth.*

Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor!

Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!

Thy letters have transported me beyond

This ignorant present, and I feel now

The future in the instant.

MACBETH

My dearest love, Duncan comes here tonight.

LADY MACBETH

And when goes hence?

MACBETH

Tomorrow, as he purposes.

LADY MACBETH

O, never Shall sun that morrow see!

Your face, my Thane, is as a book where men

May read strange matters. To beguile the time,

Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,

Your hand, your tongue; look like the innocent flower,

But be the serpent under it. He that's coming

Must be provided for; and you shall put

This night's great business into my dispatch,

Which shall to all our nights and days to come

Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.

MACBETH

We will speak further.

LADY MACBETH

Only look up clear; To alter favor ever is to fear

.Leave all the rest to me.

The scene was played with a variety of gender combinations of actors. The nature of the characters and the scene dictated, it was generally felt, that the challenge for the actor in playing either Macbeth or Lady Macbeth, was in finding the 'female side' of the male character and vice versa. The conclusion was that despite the generalities and stereotypes, in the end it was the character that mattered. If you get the character right everything else falls into place and gender does not become an issue, confirmation of the views of Havergal, Williams and Robertson above that actors should be asked in rehearsal to play character not gender. It was also felt that the physical differences between the actors playing Macbeth and Lady Macbeth were important. For instance a tiny female Macbeth and a tall male Lady Macbeth throws up problems that are to do with physicality rather than gender specific.

### Workshop Two

We started with a warm-up; the YES game.



One actors was placed in a chair at the end of the space. The others were invited to go up and ‘woo ‘ them. The only words allowed are Yes and No.

First the game was played in the actors own gender and then in the opposite gender.

After this we moved on to self-selected texts which the actors had been asked the previous week to bring with them.

The actors were asked to play their chosen speeches, some of which required another actor to be in the scene, though without lines to say.

The texts chosen were:

Male Actor 1: Viola, Twelfth Night, Act 2, Scene 2, Lines 18 - 42

*“I left no ring with her: what, means this lady.?”*

Male Actor 2: Miranda, The Tempest, Act3, Scene 1, Lines 48 to 59

*“I do not know : One of my sex...”*

Female Actor 1: Don John, Much Ado About Nothing, Act 1, Scene 2, Lines 11 - 19 and 28 - 39.

*“I wonder that?”*

Female Actor 2: Iago, Othello, Act 1, Scene 3, Lines 389 - 410

*‘Thus do I ever make my fool my purse..’*

Female Actor 3: Cassius, Julius Caesar, Act 1, Scene 1, Lines 132 - 160

*“Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world / Like a Collosus...”*

Female Actor 4: Antonio, Anthony and Cleopatra, Act 3, Scene 9, Lines 1 - 24

*“Hark, the land bids me tread no more upon’t.”*

Female Actor 5: Viola, Twelfth Night, Act 2, Scene 2, Lines 18 - 4?

*"I left no ring with her..."*

Female Actor 6: Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2, Lines 546 - 603

*"O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!"*

After a break the group moved on to

A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act 2, Scene 1, Lines 60 - 118.

Here the challenge was to bring sexuality into a scene while playing cross gender and to examine the ways in which control within a scene is affected by the gender of the actors and the relationship of that gender to the gender of the characters.

The major points which came out of the actors comments during the workshop concerned the importance of body language, both in creating a character of the opposite and gender and relating that created character to other characters.

1. There is a collection of gestures, postures and ways of using the body that we learn through conditioning and that are nothing to do with physique but simply to do with gender. (Wex, *passim*) What Ronald Pickup, the first male actor to play Rosalind in four hundred years, called 'the gestures that spring from the way a woman is made.' (above p.59)

For instance:

- Standing with legs apart or together.
- Hands used from the wrist or from the arm or the shoulder.
- The holding of the head on the neck.



2. There is another set of gestures that are derived from the physical differences of the gender (primarily the presence or otherwise of external genitalia and breasts)

For instance

- The way one crosses the arms on the chest or hold the arms in relation to the torso.
- The way in which one sits down or stands up.

3. The actors found it easier to replicate a gesture or a posture than to attach that to a movement.

For instance:

- Standing against a wall
- Sitting in a chair.

As soon as a movement was involved the force of the stance was lost.

4. The relationship of the body to the space around it was affected by gender.

And that

5. Movement was affected by gender.

All of these are the result as much of learnt behaviour as of actual physicality and so it should be possible for the actor to learn a different set of behaviours.<sup>3</sup>

It was also felt that it was easier for younger actors to learn these other behaviours than for older actors - though it was also true that the older actors

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<sup>3</sup> Hannah argues that 'male-female stereotypic movements learned early in life operate as implicit beliefs and expectations' and that they are controllers of 'male domination in our society.' (Hannah, p.156)

may have more experience of observation to bring to the mimetic task.

### Workshop Three

The third workshop concentrated on two scenes from Twelfth Night. The purpose was to explore two further aspects of the playing across gender:

1. The playing of a character who is themselves disguised as their gender other (In this case Viola, a girl who would have been played on Shakespeare's stage by a boy, disguising herself as a boy). What are the differences resulting from the 'base gender' of the actor, that is the gender from which all the other permutations come. For Shakespeare it would have been *a male as a female as a male*. For an audience today it would, in terms of dominant convention, be *a female as a female as a male*. What are the implications of these two different approaches? Schematically the difference is clear - a boy as a girl as a boy is very different from a girl as a girl as a boy. A director today can choose between these two schema in a way in which Shakespeare, with only one convention open to him, could not. What are the potential implications of the making of that choice?

The first scene run was Act 1 Scene 2 in which Viola, having been washed up on the shore after a shipwreck realises (as she thinks) that her brother has been drowned, that she is in a strange country where her safety as a woman is not assured and seeks advice from the ship's captain as to what to do. He decides



to dress as a boy (in her brother's clothes in our workshop) and present herself at court as a eunuch. We ran the scene and then discussed it. The actors felt that the main issues the scene raised, aside from the obvious questions of character that would be true of any scene, were:

- the need to ground the characters in their physical 'reality', something that has to take into account gender.
- the importance of making precise decisions about the age of the characters.

These are, of course, decisions which one would always need to make but in the context of the workshop the making of them is coloured by:

- the gender of the performer.
- what an audience will read (will a female actor of the same age appear younger in the part than a male actor?)
- the way in which the characters will interact on stage.
- the degree to which issues of sexuality will intrude into the scene.

This brings us back to the whole issue of the 'point of puberty' - how does the age of the character and the actor relate to an audience's expectation of whether that character will be post-pubescent and whether that is very different today to what it was when the play was written.

The actors felt that the decision of Viola to become a 'eunuch' was important. That she decides not to change gender but go for a negative or neutral gender,

to negate her/his sexuality was important to a playing of the part; that it added yet another layer of ambiguity to the scene giving it a sense of what one actor called 'in betweenness' Shakespeare does not follow the conceit of Viola disguising herself as a eunuch through the rest of the play and we never do hear her sing. There is a body of critical opinion that attributes this to Shakespeare's 'so-called revision' of the play (Mahood, p.20) arguing that Feste's songs were originally to be given to Viola but reassigned during the writing and performance of the play.

The use by Viola of her brother's clothes however adds a specificity to the scene and a profound pathos. Having just discovered that her brother is, as she believes, dead, Viola abandons her own clothes and dresses, in our workshop of the scene, in those of her dead brother. She also does this, as she must on an Elizabethan stage (unless she exits), *in view of the audience* and in view of the Captain, Stallybrass's 'undressing of the boy actor'. (Stallybrass, p.64) So a degree of complicity, voyeurism, knowingness with the audience is established as is an indication of sexual vulnerability with the Captain.

The scene was first run with female actors playing Viola and the Captain. Then with a male actor as Viola. The use of a man, it was felt, 'de-sexed' the scene and took out any sexual undertow in the relationship with the Captain. It also added an innocence to the scene. The female actors felt that for a female



actor to play a man (in this case the Captain) can be a liberating experience and an empowering one and so it cannot lead to innocence though the reverse might be true. The female actor brings the cultural baggage and personal baggage of being a woman to the act of dressing up as a man. Whereas a male actor has given up his power by playing a woman. If this is true it implies that a male actor and a female actor must act in entirely different ways when playing gender opposites on stage and if all character is to some extent the creation of gender then that must mean that male actors and female actors act differently - the act of acting is different for men and women.

From the audience's point of view that nature of the suspension of disbelief differs with the base gender of the actor. If the base gender is male then the audience has already suspended its disbelief before Viola dresses as a man. If the base gender is female then the moment of suspension of disbelief is not until Viola makes that change, that is well into the play itself and *the audience's suspension becomes complicit with the action of the play instead of being complicit with the entering of the playhouse. Different conventions of gender representation make for different points of audience complicity in watching the play.*

We next worked on Act 1 Scene 5, when Viola meets Olivia who immediately falls in love with someone she takes to be a man. The scene was run with every possible gender permutation:

that is

- male Viola, female Olivia
- male Viola, female Olivia
- female Viola, male Olivia
- female Viola, female Olivia

It was agreed that this is inherently an erotically charged scene but that the degree and nature of that charge is dramatically affected by the base gender of the actors.

To be able to play the subtext and give the scene its true meaning it needed actors of the same base gender in both parts although it was not significant for the actors what that base gender was. That is, two female actors could get as much from playing the scene as two male actors but a male / female combination would get less. There is a melancholy about the scene that comes from the impossibility of the situation and that this is brought out by the audience being aware of the base gender of the actors, however subliminal that awareness is. The base gender casting feeds the scenes themes of disguise, deceit, flirting and honesty. The power of the scene is also supported by having seen Viola make the gender switch in the earlier scene - the ease or otherwise of that switch both physically and emotionally affects all that happens afterwards.



### Workshop Four

The purpose of this workshop was to explore comedy and sexual violence in relation to gender casting. The first scene worked on was from A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act Three, Scene One, where Titania wakes and immediately falls in love with Bottom who has been transformed into an ass. We played it first with two female actors and second with a male actor as Bottom and a female actor as Titania. In the first run the actors felt Titania had to take on a more 'masculine' role against a female actor as Bottom and that it was uncomfortable, almost voyeuristic to watch. In the second case the scene became much less dangerous; there is a humour in seeing a woman seduce a man, the traditional roles are reversed, and such a seduction is unusual in Shakespeare and perhaps is only possible because the scene is comic. Is the rarity of such seduction in the plays because of the all male casting, would seeing a male as a female overtly seducing a male be too much for an audience to take whereas a male seducing a male as a female is easier to accept? Here the cycle of transformation is different because of Bottom's translation into an ass:

male actor to female **supernatural** character

male actor - male character - male **animal** character

but a male animal, as Jan Kott reminds us a human male *in extremis*: an ass is the ultimate male: 'Since antiquity and up to the Renaissance the as was credited with the strongest sexual potency and among all the quadrupeds is supposed to have the longest and hardest phallus.' (Kott p. 182)

We then ran the scene with two male actors. We were watching *a man and a woman seduce a man as an animal*. This was the first scene we had worked on which the actors felt had what we today would recognise as a gay subtext when played and that the subtextuality came from the comic nature of the scene. With two male actors there was no struggle for power and Titania had a physical advantage. The comic impulse was stronger than the erotic impulse so the erotic charge was different.

We played it again with two male actors but this time asked them to work to avoid any comedy in the scene, to play just the sexual struggle. The main observation was that it made Oberon's action in causing the situation seem much more cruel. The sexual power struggle seemed stronger with Titania taking on - as when it was two female actors - a more masculine role and the scene moving towards rape. Bottom becomes more vulnerable. There is more - that word again - confusion. Watching the scene the actors believed that the two creatures really would go off from the scene and have sexual intercourse. The comedy of the scene is about status and about the reversal of traditional gender roles. A major conclusion from this part of the workshop was that the scene was stronger with two actors of one gender than with two actors of different gender but that **it did not matter what the gender was**. Directors interviewed above have spoken of their belief that it is easier to get to the emotional heart of some of the sexual scenes in the plays with two male



actors. These workshops indicate that it is not the maleness of the actors that is the key but the shared gender of the actors be that male or female. This will be examined further in the audience research in Chapter 8.

One scene that was referred to by Giles Havergal and others was Hamlet Act Three, Scene One, where the Prince tells Ophelia that he has never loved her and to get to a nunnery. We worked on this scene next. We followed the same pattern in running the scene:

- two female actors
- one male actor (Hamlet) one female actor (Ophelia)
- two male actors

In the first run the actor playing Ophelia was surprised at how vulnerable she felt. The other actors found the scene frightening. The actor playing Hamlet felt a need to bring aggression to the scene. With a male actor as Hamlet and a female actor as Ophelia the scene became much less violent. The scene still retained its menace but the violence did not translate into physicality. As one actor said, “men have less ‘bits’ off limits” and that, an actor is aware of the ‘propriety’ of what he or she is doing to another actor, that the base gender sets limits to what it is possible for the characters to do with one another. Same gender casting allows more physicality which in turns allows for more violence and, as we saw in The Dream scene earlier in the workshop, more sexuality. We then had a short look at a further scene from the play which brings in the issue of age and a different type of relationship: Hamlet with his

mother Gertrude in Act Three, Scene Four. We ran the scene with two different pairs of female actors and then with two male actors. Again the violence of the scene became explicit though it was felt that with female actors Gertrude becomes the dominant character in the scene and with male actors Hamlet become the dominant character:

### The Actor's Viewpoint

The actors taking part in the workshops, were asked to make their own notes and observations on open response sheets completed after the workshops.

- Actor 1 (Male) :

‘The difficulty is to resist the temptation to generalise, but there do seem to be certain characteristics which are conveyed more readily by actors than actresses. Inevitably this must be influenced by the physical and vocal capabilities of men and women’ He also spoke of the value of the workshops in helping to ‘develop one’s range of expression and interpretation, which must be good for an actor.’ This word *range* is one often used to describe an actor, it is a part of the common, limited vocabulary of agents about their clients and actors about themselves. But in speaking of *range*, the word is generally used to describe an ability to cover a number of different emotions. The word is often qualified as in ‘emotional range’.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Except of singers where range has a very specific meaning of the distance between the highest and lowest notes that can be sung. Here there is a limited breakdown of range into categories closely related to gender. Soprano and



- Actor 2: (Male)

‘I’ve found the whole experience of cross-gender performance in these classes stimulating, immensely enjoyable and strangely freeing.’ Freeing of what? From his own gender constraints? ‘It has, by implication, made me question my own assumptions about gender...and also to re-examine my ideas on the fundamental nature of acting.’ We will see this relationship between playing

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Alto for female voices and Tenor and Bass for male voices. If a singer can move beyond the range expected of their gender this is a cause of remark and indeed a skill or ability that generally makes the performer more desirable, certainly more interesting. Whether the tenor who can reach a ‘top C’, the soprano who can glide effortlessly into high coloratura, the Russian bass who can sing basso profundo or the nightclub chanteuse whose voice reaches husky depths, here there is something noteworthy/prized about singers who either stretch to the limits of gender - the Queen of the Night - or cross the boundaries of gender c.f. the competitiveness between Domingo and Pavarotti and the lack of manliness if they are not able to hit a ‘female’ note. There are categories of male singers who cross the borders completely, the castrati who brought a manly strength to playing female parts by having their manhood removed and the counter-tenor who was popular in Purcell’s time (indeed Purcell himself sang counter-tenor) but fell out of favour from Purcell’s death until 1960 when the composer Michael Tippett discovered Alfred Deller singing in Canterbury Cathedral Choir during the Second World War, and with Tippett’s help, Deller ‘achieved a one-man revival of the Purcellian counter-tenor voice.’ (H. Carpenter, p. 391) In August 1959 Benjamin Britten approached Deller to play the part of Oberon in an operatic version he was writing of Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Deller had doubts but Britten’s librettist, Peter Pears, assured him “Your height and presence will be absolutely right (-so will your beard!)” (Carpenter, p.391) There is a parallel here with the finale of Prospect’s Pericles when a counter-tenor was brought on to sing the final song. There beard was also noted then! Britten’s opera opened in 1960: ‘Deller was still regarded as a curiosity. Though he was the father of three children and sported a beard he still had to endure insinuations about his virility. It may be that Britten, far from wanting Oberon to seem neutral, intended to suggest that there was something different about him sexually, possibly that he was a kind of Peter Pan who would never ‘grow up’ into puberty.’ (Carpenter, p.394)



gender and the 'fundamental nature of acting' become prominent in the experiments in the next chapter. Acting gender is just one part of the job/craft of the actor. '...our preconceptions of gender are shattered and we begin to see relationships anew, a space develops where anything is possible and where we, the audience can learn and experience as the characters learn and experience....the basic dilemmas was this: on the one hand I felt I needed to 'take on' whatever elements of femininity were required, but on the other hand not becoming weak in the process - that somehow being feminine must mean feeling weak (as a male). In my search I found I had to actually do less in order to suggest more - a fundamental acting principle rediscovered! By doing 'less' I mean ridding myself as much as possible of any obvious outward male-ish behaviour and directing my search away from body/externals and inwards towards mind/spirit. I was trying to find some sort of female mind or attitude or feeling to the world. Then a curious thing happened: the more I tried to let go of physical male action, the more internal space and freedom I felt. It was a kind of liberation, and in this 'vacuum of action' a different way of seeing began to take shape, and actions appropriate to that seeing began to manifest which could tentatively be called feminine...' Through a full rehearsal process, 'maybe it is possible for men to play women (and vice versa) and that the woman/character that emerges would become as real and as particular as any we see in real life. As an example of differentiation between two female roles - Olivia and Viola felt very different as women. Although both are vulnerable for their individual reasons....regardless of



whether an actor plays a man or a woman, he must always strive to find the innerness of a role - its spirit and mind.' The actor speaks of the need to BE rather than DO.

- Actor 3 (female)

'I learned that it is much more important to try to identify the masculine and feminine sides of each character, whatever their gender; and to unlock those traits by admitting both exist in yourself. For instance, vulnerability might be seen to be an inherently female quality - or certainly something to be found in many of Shakespeare's women. It became obvious, however, that it cannot be 'played' any more than any other quality can -that perhaps it springs more from the character's situation and how much they have to lose.'

- Actor 4 (female)

The workshops 'challenged my assumptions about typical male and female behaviour - generally as well as specifically related to Shakespeare.'

- Actor 5 (female)

This female actor noted that the workshops brought out what she called 'interesting attitudes from the group.' The actors' prejudices and preconceptions were a factor in what took place. 'During what started as an exploration of physical technique re. playing opposite sex, it became apparent

that at the centre of the most convincing performances (men playing women, women playing men) was the stripping down of all assumed, defensive technique, leaving just the actor playing the character. Funnily enough, in a project that was gender-based, gender seemed less important than the character.'

- Actor 6 (female)

Comments from an actor who describes herself as a 'character' actress, 'who is quite grounded and feels safer when 'taking on' a character. Playing a man (for a woman) is about assuming manly baggage - taking on a male stance, an attitude - be it heroic or otherwise, a breadth of presence on stage, a confidence and status, an **active** role - whereas successful portrayals of many of Shakespeare's women, particularly his heroines, seem to require a paring down and a simplicity - of letting the words and poetry speak the truth.' Actor 6 was the only actor to make this point - that there is something about the nature of Shakespeare's women that is different. If this is true, does this need for simplicity and paring down come from the fact that the parts were written for 'boys' who 'let the words and poetry speak the truth.'?

Points raised by the actors in their notes:

1. Don't generalise
2. Work affected by physical capabilities of the actor.
3. Work affected by vocal capabilities of the actor



4. Actor's range covers gender as well as emotion or age.
5. Playing cross-gender 'frees' the actor.
6. Different genders fill the stage space in different ways.
7. INNER not OUTER life is what has to be achieved
8. Less is more. Don't indicate gender.
9. Can a male actor become a female character without becoming weak?  
Without giving up some male strength? How can an actor hold on to those aspects of their own gender that are needed to play the character of the opposite gender eg the masculinity of St. Joan.
10. Gender characteristics cannot be played apart from character.
11. Need to find the masculinity and femininity of every character and relate that to the masculinity and femininity of the actor.
12. Status is directly related to gender.
13. Activity/passivity is directly related to gender.
14. BE don't DO.

This last point, which I will return to at the end of the chapter, points to a central truth about acting - that acting is about being and not doing.

## CONCLUSIONS

The first set of workshops supported the four premises derived from the historical research and the directors' viewpoints from which they had started, namely:

1. In performing the plays of Shakespeare the casting of the 'base gender' of

an actor to the 'base gender' of the character is not a primary requirement.

2. Casting gender of actor to gender of character can be counter-productive to the presentation of the dramatic 'truth' of a scene.

3. That the true nature of the violence in a scene in a play by Shakespeare can be reduced, even suppressed and hidden, by the failure to cross cast.

4. All gender is in part an accumulation of performances learnt and developed for social and personal use which have to be abandoned or modified for the successful representation on stage of any character whatever their gender.

We have also shown through this series of workshops that for the actor,

- The building of a character is of greater concern than the building of a gender, though the latter may be a part of the former.
- The building/construct of gender may be more or less difficult/important depending upon the character.
- The inter-relationships of the constructed character to other characters in a scene affects the playing of that character's gender which is in a constant state of modification throughout the play.
- There is a relationship between the gender construct of the character and the gender construct of the actor. (The nature of that relationship is something to be explored in the next part of this thesis through a more controlled workshop situation).
- Choices about gender casting are affected by the tone and content of the play. A comedy plays in a different way when cross-cast to the way a tragedy plays.



Most importantly we have demonstrated that:

- The actor and director has the choice to indicate character gender without indicating actor gender or to indicate both actor gender and character gender to the audience simultaneously and that this double indication, akin to Brechtian *verfremdung*, can be used to add to the possibilities of what an audience perceives on the stage and how that perception is read.

So three further areas of study emerge:

1. What are the elements that make a successful gender construct on stage - ie make the gender of the character believable/convincing to an audience?
2. How does the gender construct of the actor relate to the gender construct of the character that actor is playing?
3. How does the actor and/or the director control the audience perception of actor gender and character gender and what uses can be made of this?

### WORKSHOPS WITH STUDENT ACTORS

The next set of workshops moved on to tackle the first of these questions.

#### Purpose of the Workshops:

To investigate what the elements are that make a successful gender construct on stage - ie make the gender of the character believable/convincing to an audience? To investigate how those elements are modified in the playing of Shakespeare. The workshops were therefore designed to start by taking 'character' out of the question (as with the first warm-up in the Actors' Centre

workshops) and look at the way in which an actor tackles playing cross-gender as an abstract - outside of the creation of a specific character. The assumption behind this exercise was that the actor recognises the way in which they portray their own gender and therefore has a concept of what we will call their 'gender other'; finding an opposite of themselves to play on stage. There were key questions:

- Were observation and experience factors?
- Would it be easier in one 'gender direction' than another (ie male to female or female to male?)
- Was self-awareness a factor in the construction of a performed gender?

For the next workshops I took an entire year group of first year acting students from Middlesex University. This was a much younger group than the professional actors at the Actors' Centre, of student actors at the end of only the first year of their degree course and therefore without the same experience of acting or of life. This was an important factor in helping to find out whether experience, observation and self-awareness were factors in the creation of gender on stage. I started with a much fuller warm-up than had been done with the Actors Centre workshops.

### Workshop One

Warm-up starting with the students lying on the floor and doing some basic breath work. Then a physical warm up, taking the breath into the body while standing and exercising every joint, neutralising the body and exercising those



parts of it which may not be used by the actor but might be used by the character they are playing - a move towards a gender neutrality from which to start. We then moved to walking around an imaginary grid on the floor and introduced an environment as the students moved. They were asked to imagine that they were walking in a desert and asked to imagine/recognise how the environment affected the ways in which they used the different parts of their body - the heat, the sand underfoot, the dryness of the air. Suddenly it rained and the students responded physically to that change. The object still was to free the body and shake of the habits and attributes of body use and language that might inhibit the creation of the gender opposite. Still on the grid the students were then asked to make their body slowly take on the attributes of a person 102 years old. As with the Actor Centre workshops gender was approached obliquely but because of their limited experience the students were not required, as had been the professional actors, to take on a change of age and gender simultaneously. The age of 102 was chosen to allow the students to push as far as possible in the direction of age. Then the students were told to become themselves once more, shaking off the age as they moved around the grid.

Having worked on these two extremes of bodily transformation - of age and environment - we moved on to gender. Still on the grid the students were asked to walk as if they were of the opposite gender to their own and to observe the differences in the way in which they used their body and the way

in which they related to the space around them. Then the boys were asked to sit out and observe the girls and then the girls were asked to sit out and observe the boys. Both groups were asked to exchange greetings with each other as they moved. The question was then asked : are there different ways in which one would use the *same* body to be a *different* gender?

Comments included:<sup>5</sup>

♂ difficult to draw the line between playing a woman and playing a stereotypical homosexual. [This was a comment on which there was general agreement, though it was not something that had come up as an issue at all with the professional actors.]

♂ women have a lighter way of moving.

♂ women use their heads and their hips differently.

♂♀ greetings and interaction brought out the gender characteristics more.

♀ it required an 'attitude' to play a male.

♀ it required more aggression to play a male.

♀ shoulders, hips and pelvis were used differently.

♀ felt more solid as a man

♀ less movement in the hips as a man.

♀ weight further down on the floor as a man

♂ weight up in the air playing a woman.

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<sup>5</sup> ♂ = male actor; ♀ = female actor



♂♀ stance different.

The word constantly returned to by the students was 'attitude'. To them gender was largely a question of attitude, to oneself, those around one and the space one finds oneself in. It may be that this was the result of working with a group of young undergraduates, perhaps still exploring their own sexuality. After this discussion we moved on. This time the female students returned to the grids as men and added greetings into their movement. The men were then introduced as women. All this work was non-character specific. But it was gender specific, young actors finding their gender other. The students were thrown into a looking-glass world, but was it a distorting mirror or one which reflected back only the isolated essentials of the gender-other. There were no rules about character or about situation.

The observations this time included:

- ♂ It was intimidating going into the room of women as men.
- ♀ Recognised the intimidation of their assumed gender but did not recognise the timidity of the men as women. The men as women did not know how to handle the sexual/gender situation they found themselves in.
- ♂ felt they never occupied the space but were always on the periphery as a result of their assumed gender.
- ♀ occupied the space more fully.
- ♀ competitive when the men as women entered.

After a break we moved on to two speeches from Shakespeare.

The first was King John, Act Five, Scene two, lines 68 - 108, Lewis the Dauphin and Cardinal Pandulph (as used at the Actors Centre).

The scene was played with three pairs of female students.

Major issues raised by the students were:

1. The need to separate the specifics of character from the generalities of gender. The fact that Lewis is a soldier, proud, arrogant, physically heavy are not necessarily gender specific.
2. The 'range' of the voice of the character of Lewis and how this relates to gender and character. Are the two in this case indistinguishable?
3. The way in which the 'control' of the scene relates to gender.
4. 'I was too feminine. I was walking too lightly.' said one of the female students acting Lewis. But others observed that men can be light and that Lewis could be light, agile as a character. But it could be as difficult for a male to play the part of a soldier as for a female actor - a sword-wielding soldier is as far from a contemporary male actor as from a female actor.
5. The public or private nature of the scene - if there is an audience within the scene, can affect the expression of gender. The scene is as much about the implications of power as physical power itself.

The first workshop ended with the actors going up in pairs, playing the opposite gender, and sitting on a pair of chairs at the far end of the space.

They then stood and returned. They then repeated the exercise as themselves.



### Workshop Two

The students were divided into five groups and each group given a scene from Twelfth Night to prepare to perform for the others. Three groups were given Act 1 Scene 2 - in which Viola disguises herself as boy. Two groups were given Act 1 scene 5 (the scene between Olivia and Viola in which the ring is sent after Viola) and one group was given Act 5 scene 1 lines 101 - 175 (a scene not previously worked on at The Actors Centre, in which Olivia tells the Duke that Viola/Cesario is her husband.) The gender mix of each group meant that, apart from the first group to play the first scene, there had to be a degree of cross-gender casting in every group, but the practicalities of playing character and staging the scene, given the short time allowed for preparation, took precedence over gender issues. The scenes were played and then discussed in terms of character and gender playing.

The workshop finished with each student being asked to walk to a chair, sit down, face a video camera and say their name - but as their gender other. Many found this difficult without resorting to humour. Almost all exaggerated their base gender as soon as they had completed the exercise - the girls running giggling back to where they had started, the boys returning with a 'manly' swagger. Only the members of the group who might be thought to be homosexual tackled it with any subtlety - certainly differently.

### Final Comments by Students

Written on open response sheets to allow anonymity within the group.

♀ The males used their chest more as their centre when playing female, whereas the females lowered their centre to their pelvis and became more grounded. in their walks.

♀ Subtle movements work better rather than stereotypes.

♂ I think the girls coped better than the boys. I found myself slipping into the realms of being camp.

♀ (as a man) Movements heavier. Centre lower. Voice deeper.

♀ The males 'centre' is more around the pelvis area, rather than the chest. Their walk is a lot heavier, especially in their heels, and their stance is a lot more grounded, (although it was difficult not to stereotype it).

♂ Very difficult to achieve credibly and avoid clichés. Requires specific attention to detail and research.

♀ When I was playing a man my weight was very solid and into the ground. Your centre is around your pelvis whereas with a woman it is around their chest. I found it hard not to be stereotypically laddish.

♀ Found it difficult to sustain the male way of movement. Found being solid in movements put a restriction on natural impulses of my own emotions/movements.

♂ With women the energy goes upwards, with men downwards. Difficult to avoid being stereotypically camp, over-poised.

♀ Embarrassing to recognise self in male version of female.



♀ To play a man you have to feel more solid or rather rooted to the ground; to get a sense of weight. the shoulders sway and the hips have to be still as in fact the roots of a man's movement seems to be the upper part of his body (chest, shoulders and neck) whereas a woman's stems from the lower part of the body (pelvis, hips and bum).

♀ Weight lower and centred around the pelvis...movement mostly forwards ...movement of hands a lot stiller...the whole body a lot heavier and more laid back.

♀ No movement of the hips which I personally found difficult.

♀ Not only did I feel different in my body but I thought differently.

♂ I found subtle movements very hard....The final method I settled with was a very slight shift in the *PELVIS* and thinking that I had breasts so that I was conscious of the weight moving.

WOMAN: slight pelvis lock; inner thought of breasts; more AIRY breath.

♀ I enjoyed the workshop very much because it helps to know how the opposite gender feels as well as behaves physically.

♂ When you play a woman how they really are it feels really weird. (sic)

There is then a strong consensus around certain key issues: the physical use of the body, the shifting in weight; the difficulty of attaching movement to stance and posture; the importance of attitude and how that come out of body language.

But also there is a good deal of insecurity, perhaps tied with uncertainty about the base gender characteristics of the individual student; a consciousness of

the danger of falling into stereotypical behaviour; a nervousness of *camp* and a failure to understand the difference between playing a female and playing camp; and in a few of the more aware students, thoughts about the *mind* of the gender being as important as the *physicality*.

### Conclusions

The workshops supported the premises on which they were set up and revealed some additional conclusions, namely:

- The elements required to make a successful gender construct on stage - ie make the gender of the character believable/convincing to an audience - include both physical and psychological elements.
- There is a generally accepted and recognised *vocabulary of gender* - a series of learnt signs and physical usages which can be used mimetically by an actor to indicate gender.
- It is possible to construct gender on stage outside of the specifics of character.
- Construction of stage gender is easier in one 'gender direction', female to male than another, male to female.
- Female actors were able to construct male characters or their male 'gender other' without indicating sexuality.
- Male actors constructing a female gender other often brought in sexuality through the introduction of camp; in other words that they often indicated homosexuality, through stereotypical female behaviour, rather than



- female gender.
- In the playing of Shakespeare the playing of gender is subservient to the creation of character.
- Observation and experience are factors in the creation of a successful gender construct that relies on more than assumed stereotypes.
- Self-awareness is a factor in the construction of a performed gender.

Nancy Henley, in her investigation of non-verbal communication, divides such communication into nine areas of study beginning with ‘the grand schemes of *space*, *time*, and *environmet*, proceeding from the impersonal to the personal through the subtler aspects of *language* and the global dimensions of *demeanor*, finally into *touch*, *body movement*, *eye contact* and *facial expression*.’ (Henley, p.26). Henley also uses the phrase ‘tactual politics’ in talking about touch and gender. Many of these conclusions suport Henley’s divisions.

It was now necessary to return to a group of experienced professional actors to test these conclusions further and make an intial exploration of the areas unexplored at the end of the first set of works, that is:

1. How does the gender construct of the actor relate to the gender construct of the character that actor is playing?
2. How does the actor and/or the director control the audience perception of actor gender and character gender and what uses can be made of this?

## ACTORS CENTRE WORKSHOPS TWO

The second series of workshops with professional actors again took place over four weeks at the Actors Centre in Central London. Running the workshops there enabled me to find another *self-selected* group of professional actors, none of whom had worked with me before and who would come to the workshops without previous experience of playing cross-gender. The classes were advertised in The Actors Centre programme as before. A maximum of 14 participants was set for the workshop series. 11 actors registered of whom 4 were men and 7 were women.

### Workshop One

The initial workshop, with a new group, covered much of the ground that had been covered before, looking at the simple problems for an actor playing gender and asking how an actor plays their gender opposite. The workshops started with simple exercises:

- Walk around the room on an imaginary grid. Greet everyone else in the room.
- Do the same as your gender other.

Improvised social situation: the office party. Female actors as men in the room. Male actors enter as women. Male actors as women in the room. Female actors enter as men.

We then moved on to playing gender in Shakespeare. But instead of going



straight to a text and the specifics inherent in that work, the actors were asked to invent an imaginary and wordless scene from a Shakespeare play.

- Male actor as female character has to retrieve flower dropped by her lover and sit down with it.
- Female actor as male character has to steal sword and return across the room with it.

Only then did we go into specific characters., working with four speeches from the plays.

1. Henry V (Act III Scene i)

KING: *Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;*

2. Henry VI Part I (Act I Scene ii)

PUCELLE: *Dauphin, I am by birth a shepherd's daughter,*

3. Romeo & Juliet (Act I Scene iii)

NURSE: *Even or odd, of all days in the year*

4. Macbeth (Act I scene v)

LADY MACBETH: *The raven himself is hoarse*

Many of the issues that came up in the first workshop were recurrent ones from previous workshops. The main ones were to do with occupation of the

space, posture, leading from different parts of the body, and voice. But there were some new ideas and they were to do with the concept of an actor's *shape* in the performing space. The use of the grid creates a discipline to help the actors use the entire space, to neutralise the way in which they use the room. But one of the male actors said that as a woman he found it very difficult to stick to the grid - that moving in a straight line was difficult as a woman. This was recognised by the other male actors and conversely the female actors found it *easier* to stick to the grid as males - indeed I observed one female actor who had not been working to the grid at all who suddenly moved onto it when playing male. This idea of shape affected not just movement in the space but occupation of the space and holding of the body - the women adopting angular poses as men and the men adopting fluid poses as women. Another issue which came up for the first time was that of eye contact (Henley's 8th area). The consensus was that it is easier for a man to make eye contact and to look at those around him than a woman. There was agreement among all the actors that much if not all of social physical gender behaviour was learnt and that the most difficult challenge for the actor was not to adopt new behaviour but to drop, to recognise and unlearn, decades of learnt behaviour. With the speeches the playing of gender was important to all the characters except for Oberon where it was agreed by the group that gender was an irrelevance but that sexuality was important. Interestingly and paradoxically the only character whom the actors felt to be inherently 'sexy' was the one for whom they also felt gender to be unimportant, something



which confirmed the original thesis that gender is a mask to sexuality. It was Joan La Pucelle who caused the most debate - some saw her as a character who changes gender during the course of the speech; others as a character who moves from child to adult during the course of the speech; others as a character who is an innocent, childlike and for whom gender is unimportant. With the scene from Macbeth it was agreed that the version with two male actors was much more sexually charged a re-emphasising of the idea that sex and violence are more powerful in a single actor gender production. The use of two male actors allowed the release of much more sexuality in the scene and the potential for much more violence. The actors felt able to say much more by doing much less - a touch of the cheek between the two men was seen to have the equivalence of a full kiss between a man and a woman.

### Workshop Two

The purpose of this workshop was to look at the relationship between the creation of gender and character in more detail and to look at issues of sexuality and violence. The group was asked to bring in a speech of their choice from a character of their gender-other. We worked on:

#### 1. Anthony and Cleopatra (Act I Scene v)

CLEOPATRA: *O Charmian, / Where think'st thou he is now?*

#### 2. The Winter's Tale (Act III scene ii)

HERMIONE: *Sir, spare your threats*

3. King Lear (Act I scene ii)

EDMUND: *This is the excellent foppery of the world.*

4. Hamlet (Act III scene i)

HAMLET: *To be, or not to be- that is the question:*

5. As You Like It (Epilogue)

ROSALIND: *It is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue;*

6. The Winter's Tale (Act IV scene iv )

PERDITA: *For you there's rosemary and rue;*

7. Hamlet (Act II scene ii)

HAMLET: *O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!*

The main areas of discussion were around voice, physical characteristics, audience acceptance and the relationship of the actor to the character being portrayed. The actors felt that it was not necessary to make any adjustment to the pitching of the voice to portray a gender other character -that the less that was imposed between the actor and the character the better. They felt that a physical statement was more important than a vocal statement. For instance the male actor playing Cleopatra made no vocal concession to the part, but in posing himself curvaceously on a rostrum to play the part he physicalised Cleopatra. When asked to play it again with a female actor opposite as Charmian, the complicity of their speech, the nature of what was being said, added to the conviction of playing the gender-other rather than taking away from it. Neither did either of the female actors playing Hamlet make any vocal



concession. Physicality, the shape of the actor and the occupation of the playing space were seen as of much more importance than the vocalisation of gender. The male actor playing Perdita felt that it was easier for him to play a girl of an age similar to his, than to play an older woman (he first chose then rejected Cleopatra as his choice) or than a male character older than himself. He felt closer to Perdita than to Leontes. He felt it easier 'to make an emotional connection to a younger girl than a mature woman or man.' The other actors agreed that the emotional connection with the character was what was most important and that this was not dictated by gender. Closeness between actor and character was shown to be of over-riding importance; and closeness does not imply the same base gender between actor and character. All agreed that no 'tricks' were needed in playing gender but that ways of using ones body became important and came out of the necessities of the speeches chosen - so Perdita became 'light' of carriage and movement, Hamlet 'solid' and so on. Rosalind's speech was left for fuller consideration in the final week, but all agreed that the female actor playing the speech was disconcerting in being simultaneously male, female and gender neutral.

We then looked at Hamlet's scene with Ophelia and played it in the following ways:

- Male actor as Hamlet opposite a Female actor as Ophelia
- Male actor as Hamlet opposite Male actor as Ophelia
- Female actor as Hamlet opposite Female actor as Ophelia

In each case the actors then swopped over and so played the scene in opposite character to that previously played. What became very clear, confirming what had previously been shown in the other workshops, was that with two actors of the same gender in the roles the scope for emotional and physical violence became much greater. Even when the scene was played in very different ways, even when the violence implied in the scene was not physicalised, the scene took on a heightened intensity with actors of the same base gender playing two characters of different genders from each other.

### Workshop Three

After two workshops which had looked at the ways in which gender could be portrayed in Shakespeare, we moved on in the third workshop to look at the issues involved when a character disguises themselves as their gender other in the plays. The play we worked on was Twelfth Night. The first scene worked on was Act I scene ii, the scene in which Viola first appears, having been washed up from the shipwreck in which, she believes, her brother to have been drowned. The sea-captain tells her where she is and helps her disguise herself as a eunuch so as to present herself at court. The character issues came first: what was Viola's class, age; what were her emotions at the beginning of the scene; did she fear the captain; what were her expectations in going to court; why disguise herself. Then came the issues around the disguise: why a eunuch and not a boy or man; what form did the disguise take; were they her brother's clothes she wore; how was the captain complicit in the disguising;



what sexual charge if any came out of this; how easy was it to adopt the disguise; how convincing a male was she; what were the signifiers of her gender otherness to the audience, to herself, to other characters? These are complicated issues and ones which are altered by the base gender of the actors in the parts. We played the scene in various actor gender combinations. Male/female; female/female; male/male. We found the nature of the disguise to be dependent upon the base gender of the actor. A female actor as a female character disguising herself as a male is a different thing from a male actor as a female character disguising herself as a male. And the nature of that disguise is transformed by the other cross gender acting in the scene. The vulnerability of Viola, her sexuality, the ease of her disguising are all affected by the base genders of the actors involved. The key to the scene from a gender point of view is the disguise. We found that a male actor playing Viola made no attempt to disguise himself as a woman - one of the principles learnt in the previous workshops - but that in changing from Viola to Cesario he had to disguise himself as a man even though he had a male base gender.

The second scene we worked on was Act I Scene v, the scene in which Viola, on behalf of her master Orsino, with whom she is in love, goes to woo Olivia who, thinking her to be a man, falls in love with her. The levels of gender, identity and disguise complexity are again dependent upon the base gender of the actors and the combination of base genders. A male actor as Olivia falls in love with a male actor as Viola disguised as a man who loves another man

playing a man. At the beginning of the scene Viola is unsure which of the two 'women' on stage is which - another area of confusion and disguise. The decision about how comic to play the scene is also affected by the gender casting - a male Maria, as we have said, is more comic in its possibilities. The melancholia and pathos of the scene - to some extent its emotional heart - is also affected by the gender casting. In a scene which is about the impossibility of the situation, of literally a love that dares not speak its name - that impossibility is compounded by the base gender of the actors. Where does the impossibility lie - at the base with three male actors; at the next level up with three female characters, or at the level above that with two female and a female disguised as a male? Or in a combination of all three? If you take out the base level do you not reduce dramatically (literally) what you are able to present on stage?

The degree of freedom within the disguise is affected by Maria's presence - it is the being alone with Olivia and the fact that they are two women that allows Viola some of the freedom in what she says - the passion of her willow cabin speech comes from the fact that she is speaking as if a woman speaking to a man - Orsino. So Olivia takes on the metaphorical disguise of a man as the scene proceeds and Viola loses her disguise.

In the scene which immediately follows (Act II scene ii) Viola is alone on stage when Malvolia comes in with a ring which Olivia has asked him to



return, claiming Viola left it for her:

*'I left no ring with her, what means this lady?  
Fortune forbid my outside have not charm'd her!'*

For the first time Viola confronts the limits and the possibilities of her disguise:

*'Poor lady, she were better love a dream.  
Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness  
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much'*

This is the first time we see Viola alone on stage. Alone she has no necessity of gender or gender disguise. She occupies that *in between* world of the gender neutral, a third sex, though that is perhaps too loaded a term, a world of *gender undeducibility*, man as woman as man. The male actor choosing to play Viola left with an infinity of gender choices and with the audience implicated in that choice. Viola can choose to be either gender or none at all. Only when Malvolio enters does she have to readopt her male gender. Once she is alone again she can once more exist in a world where all gender choices are open to her. Only we, the audience, recognise the truth. She exists in a *gender possible* world that is the world of the stage, the Shakespearian stage, the modern stage, the world where her only companions are the audience. It is also the stage, the acting space she has created for herself in the world she has been shipwrecked on.

### Workshop Four

The final week looked at the issues raised over the previous weeks in relation to Henry VI Part I (Act I Scene ii), the scene in which The Dauphin hides behind Regnier who presents himself as the Dauphin in order to question Joan. Joan immediately recognises the deception. Nine actors were divided into three groups of three and given 30 minutes to prepare a staging of the short scene. The groups had a free choice over casting. The casting decisions they made were:

#### **Group one:**

- Female actor as Reignier
- Male actor as Dauphin
- Female actor as Joan

#### **Group two:**

- Male actor as Reignier
- Female actor as Dauphin
- Male actor as Joan

#### **Group three:**

- Female actor as Reignier
- Male actor as Richard
- Female actor as Joan

Only one group chose to present a male actor as Joan. All chose different approaches to Joan's gender and her strength. It was the male actor who played least with the character's masculinity - he was the most conventionally



‘female’ of the Joans and the one most obviously ‘blessed’ by religious conviction. This was also the group with the only female actor as the Dauphin. Despite this decision over gender casting, it was this group who gave what was regarded by its peers to be the most convincing interpretation of the scene.

The workshops concluded with an exploration of the gender issues raised by a performance of Rosalind’s epilogue from As You Like It which all the actors had been asked to learn in preparation. All were asked to deliver it to the other actors. With each delivery new layers of gender ambiguity were found. With every delivery new questions were raised and few answers found.

- Why is the speech, unique in Shakespeare, there?
- What gender is the actor? does it matter?
- How does the speech reflect the complicity of the audience in the play it has seen?
- Does every member of the audience, regardless of their gender, feel
- ‘love’/sexual attraction to Rosalind/Ganymede?
- At what points in the speech does the actor make statements about the gender of themselves and their character?
- Could the speech be delivered by any member of the cast? It is generally referred to as ‘Rosalind’s’ epilogue but does it have to be? Is this just a performance tradition?

We had a wide variety of interpretations:

Teasing

Confrontational

Ambiguous

Camp

Coy

Subtle

Filthy

What feelings should be left in the audience? Is it, as one actor felt, an invitation to licence and depravity in the audience? Or as another felt, a subtle questioning of the sexuality of the audience? Or is it just a 'pantomime dame' romp of a speech. All approaches were tried and all worked convincingly - an indication of the endless multi-layering of the gender ambiguity of the play. New questions were raised which had not been part of the workshop process until that point - primarily about sexuality and camp. The speech worked very well played as a piece of 'high camp', Meyer's 'grandest manifestation of the gay subcultural aesthetic' (Meyer, p.68) but would an Elizabethan audience have had a sense of camp when they would have had no understanding of gay subculture? And interestingly it was one of the female actors who was convincingly camp in her delivery of the text; and camp is usually assumed to be a gay male attribute. To what extent does the sexuality of the actor, as distinct from their biological sex or their gender, affect their ability to deliver



the fullness of the speech - or the gender complexities of the character and situation in the play? Does it make any difference? Can the actor be *sexuality neutral* as they can be gender neutral in assuming the part?

### Actors' Responses

All the actors were asked to give their thoughts and comments on the workshops on open response sheets once the workshops had finished.

- Actor 1 (male):

‘The freshness of the text leapt off the pages watching it from a different gender’s point of view. Saying that, the sex of the actor seemed more relevant, highlighting hidden pathos and disguised meanings.’

- Actor 2 (female):

‘The workshops were a good way of helping explore all aspects of a character because you constantly went between male/female perspectives.....It would have been nice...to look at the period of the plays, and some different time settings...so you not only have the sex to explore but the modern interpretation which will influence the gender playing as well.’

- Actor 3 (male):

‘In the early stages it was hard to find something approaching a genuine femininity. But it’s all there inside. Once we concentrated on particular characters it began to work - playing unspecified types I find myself employing a kind of physical shorthand - signalling that I am playing a dolly bird part with ‘mincing’ or prancing around. When I looked at Perdita in detail

as I would to play a part, and concentrated in the situation, it started to fall into place. I would have liked more occasion to play a female against a woman playing a male....And exploring gender neutral would be good too, with regard to parts like Ariel...'<sup>6</sup>

- Actor 4 (male) :

‘Rosalind’s epilogue was a new discovery!’

- Actor 5 (male):

‘It was exciting to see the transformations that took place. Weight distribution, stance, strength of movement, voice placement etc. can all assist in the illusion of cross-gender....The most interesting aspect to me however has been the realisation that the approach to cross-gender playing is no different to playing any character. You still start with the basic questions, who am I? where am I from? And then the what if? questions...’

- Actor 6 (female):

‘The perennially fascinating subject of whether there really are any differences between the sexes and what they are...’

### CONCLUSIONS FROM ALL THE WORKSHOPS

The workshops have demonstrated the propositions put forward at the beginning of this chapter that:

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<sup>6</sup> In fact there are very few characters in Shakespeare that could be considered gender neutral: Time in The Winter’s Tale, Choruses in Henry V and Romeo and Juliet, and Puck and Ariel perhaps for reasons of youth or insubstantiality.



1. In performing the plays of Shakespeare the casting of the 'base gender' of an actor to the 'base gender' of the character is not a primary requirement.
2. Casting gender of actor to gender of character can be counter-productive to the presentation of the dramatic 'truth' of a scene.
3. That the true nature of the violence in a scene in a play by Shakespeare can be reduced, even suppressed and hidden, by the failure to cross cast.
4. All gender is in part an accumulation of performances learnt and developed for social and personal use which have to be abandoned or modified for the successful representation on stage of any character whatever their gender.

They have also demonstrated a number of other truths in the playing of gender, both generally and in the performance of Shakespeare in particular.

- Actors find it easier to replicate a gesture or a posture than to attach that to a movement.
- The relationship between an actors body and the space it inhabits is affected by the playing of gender.
- It is easier for younger actors to learn gender behaviours than older ones, though it is also true that older actors have more experience to bring to the mimetic task.
- That in scenes requiring gender disguise, the base gender casting feeds the scenes themes.
- Scenes of sexuality and sexual violence between characters of different genders are stronger when played with actors of the same gender but that

it does not matter what gender that is.

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- That the true nature of the violence in a scene in a play by Shakespeare can be reduced, even suppressed and hidden, by the failure to cross cast.
- All gender is in part an accumulation of performances learnt and developed for social and personal use which have to be abandoned or modified for the successful representation on stage of any character whatever their gender.
- The building of a character is of greater concern than the building of a gender, though the latter may be a part of the former.
- The building/construct of gender may be more or less difficult/important depending upon the character;
- The inter-relationships of the constructed character to other characters in a scene affects the playing of that character’s gender which is in a constant state of modification throughout the play
- There is a relationship between the gender construct of the character and the gender construct of the actor. (The nature of that relationship is something to be explored in a later part of this thesis through a more controlled workshop situation).
- Choices about gender casting are affected by the tone and content of the



play. A comedy plays in a different way when cross-cast to a tragedy.

- The actor and director has the choice to indicate character gender without indicating actor gender or to indicate both actor gender and character gender to the audience simultaneously and that this double indication, akin to Brechtian *verfremdung*, can be used to add to the possibilities of what an audience perceives on the stage and how that perception is read.
- The elements required to make a successful gender construct on stage - ie make the gender of the character believable/convincing to an audience - include both physical and psychological elements.
- There is a generally accepted and recognised *vocabulary of gender* - a series of learnt signs and physical usages which can be used mimetically by an actor to indicate gender.
- It is possible to construct gender on stage outside of the specifics of character.
- Construction of stage gender is easier in one 'gender direction', female to male than another, male to female.
- Female actors were able to construct male characters or their male 'gender other' without indicating sexuality.
- Male actors constructing a female gender other often brought in sexuality through the introduction of camp; in other words that they often indicated homosexuality, through stereotypical female behaviour, rather than female gender.
- In the playing of Shakespeare the playing of gender is subservient to the

creation of character.

- Observation and experience are factors in the creation of a successful gender construct that relies on more than assumed stereotypes.
- Self-awareness is a factor in the construction of a performed gender.
- Cross gender casting allows the actors to say more by doing less.
- It is not necessary to make any adjustment to the pitching of the voice to portray a gender other character
- A physical statement was more important than a vocal statement.
- The physicalisation of gender, the shape of the actor and the occupation of the playing space, are of more importance than the vocalisation of gender.
- An actor's emotional connection with the character portrayed is not dictated by gender.

The workshops have also raised further areas for investigation, the primary ones being to do with:

- the relationship between an actor's own gender constructs and those of the character they are playing
- the relationship between sexuality and gender in actor and character.
- what does an audience see and how can the actor and/or the director control the audience perception of actor gender and character gender and what uses can be made of this?

The comment of the actors in the first series of workshops at the Actor's Centre, 'BE don't DO' is at the heart of all these findings. Acting is about



*being* and not *doing*, about finding the essential, embodying the *essence* of a role rather than indicating it through the assumption of physical and vocal traits. All the actors in these various workshops came to this central conclusion in examining, through playing gender, what it means to act. In the next part of the research, I explore what can be revealed about the nature of acting itself from the ways in which actors perform gender in a full production. These will be explored in subsequent chapters.

## CHAPTER 7

In The Paper Canoe, Eugenio Barba writes:

‘Interest in male performers who play female roles and female performers who play male roles is periodically rekindled. At such times, one might almost suspect that behind these disguises, these contrasts between reality and fiction, lies hidden one of the theatre’s secret potentialities. In each man there is a woman and in each woman there is a man. This commonplace does not help the performers become aware of the quality of his/her energy. In many civilizations, it was or is normal that a performer’s sex and that of the character s/he is playing were or are not the same.’ (Barba, 1995, p.61)

The next stage of my research was to find this ‘secret potentiality’ that lies hidden in the playing of gender and to look for it through a controlled scientific experiment into the playing of gender.

Psychological research in the field of Gender Schema Theory predicates that ‘gender’ is an individual construct adopted for social purposes. As Senelick succinctly puts it:

‘Gender is performance. As a cultural construct, made up of learned values and beliefs, gender identity (if one can posit such an absolute) has no ontological status. Whatever biological imperatives may order sexual differentiation, whatever linguistic patterns may undergird it, it is outward behaviour that calibrates the long scale of masculinity and femininity in social relations. Like a Berkeleian universe, gender exists only in so far as it is perceived; and the very components of perceived gender - gait, stance, gesture, deportment, vocal pitch and intonation, costume, accessories, coiffure - indicate the performance nature of the construct’ (Senelick p.1)

An individual then creates a character, a gender persona that is the mask through which they relate to the world; a mask that interfaces between the individual’s biological sex and their given sexuality and the society of which



they are a part. An individual may have no choice about their biological sex or their sexuality but the way in which those are communicated or demonstrated to the world around them is the result of a series of choices, conscious or unconscious, that create the individual's Gender Schema.

In building a character to play a role on stage, an actor has to create an alternative Gender Schema for that character from their own as an actor whatever the sex of the character or the sex of the actor. A male actor playing a male character will still have to construct, or adapt, a gender schema for that character just as they would if playing a female character, though it may be that there is a difference between constructing a schema for a cross-gender role and adapting a schema for a same-gender role. It is not just a matter then of playing an *opposite* gender if one is cross gender cast. But do the choices that the actor has already made (conscious or unconscious) about their own Gender Schema affect their ability to play a character with a very different gender schema? If, as Gender Schema Theory proposes, all gender is performance with society as the audience, what can that tell us about performance on stage?

And if an actor already has a social mask for themselves that expresses their gender Schema, in creating the gender mask of their character do they create a mask that fits snugly over their own; does their own mask adjust to fit the character mask placed on top of it; are both gender schemas the same or do

they have no relation to one another?

An experiment to investigate these questions will also answer a much more fundamental question about the very nature of acting itself: does an actor's personality alter to become like that of the character they are playing or does the portrayal of a character reflect the personality of the actor playing that role? Where, in other words, does the actor become the character and the character become the actor? More simply, what is acting?

The psychologist Oliver Sacks was puzzled by the question when watching the filming of his book 'Awakenings' where the actor Robin Williams played Sacks himself and Robert De Niro played a character with Parkinsonian symptoms:

'Can a neurological syndrome be acted? Can an actor with, presumably, a normally-functioning nervous system and physiology 'become' someone with a profoundly abnormal nervous system, experience and behaviour? Can he have the experience - psychological, or indeed, physiological - which would enable him to do this? There can, obviously, be a sort of imitation or mimesis - but this is not acting, this is not the level at which Bob (Robert De Niro) works. He himself had said right at the beginning, 'It's never just a method, just a technique - it's a *feeling*. You have to feel what's right, feel it out of your own experience and self-knowledge.' (Sacks, pps 380 381)

Sacks observed De Niro:

'let what he knew of the character he was playing sink down into his unconscious. and there ferment, unite with his own experiences, powers, imagination, feelings - and only then would they return, become visible, so deeply infused with his own character and subjectivity as to be, now, an integral part, an expression of, himself....I knew how deeply he might identify with the characters he



portrayed, but I had to wonder now how *neurologically* deep he might go - whether he might actually, in his acting, *become* Parkinsonian, or at least (in an astoundingly controlled fashion) somehow duplicate the neurological state of the patient. Does acting like this, I wondered, actually alter the nervous system?' (Sacks, pps 382 -383).

## THE PERFORMANCE OF GENDER - GENDER SCHEMA THEORY AND THE STAGE

Work on gender-typing and the development of Gender Schema theory in psychology ran in parallel with, but slightly preceded, the development of cross-gender performance in Britain and America that we have looked at in the thesis so far.<sup>1</sup> Scales of masculinity and femininity have been commonly used in psychology since the late 1950s. One of the most commonly used was the Masculinity - Femininity scale of the California Psychological Inventory (Gough 1957), based on differential endorsement by males and females. This was superseded by the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) which as well as using Masculinity and Femininity scales also includes a 'Neutral' scale. The BSRI 'was founded on the conception of the sex-typed person as someone who has internalised society's sex-typed standards of desirable behaviour for men and

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<sup>1</sup> 'A schema is a cognitive structure, a network of associations that organises and guides an individual's perception. A schema functions as an anticipatory structure, a readiness to search for and to assimilate incoming information in schema-relevant terms. [The child learns to apply] schematic selectivity to the self, to choose from among the many possible dimensions of human personality only that subset defined as applicable to his or her own sex and thereby eligible for organising the diverse contents of the self-concept.' (Bem 81)

women' and so the inventories 'were selected on the basis of sex-typed social desirability.' (Bem, 74)

The list of masculine items includes:

Acts as Leader; Ambitious; Aggressive; Competitive; Dominant; Forceful

and the list of feminine items includes:

Gentle; Shy; Soft Spoken; Warm; Tender (see Table 2)

Many of these items are ones that constantly came up in the actors workshops which have formed part of this study, indicating a strong correlation between the findings of Gender Schema Theory and the issues around presenting gender on stage.

'According to both Kagan (1964) and Kohlberg (1966), the highly sex-typed individual is motivated to keep his behaviour consistent with an internalised sex-role standard, a goal that he presumably accomplishes by suppressing any behaviour that might be considered undesirable or inappropriate for his sex. Thus, whereas a narrowly masculine self-concept might inhibit behaviours that are stereotyped as feminine, and a narrowly feminine self-concept might inhibit behaviours that are stereotyped as masculine, a mixed, or androgynous, self-concept might allow an individual to freely engage in both "masculine" and "feminine" behaviours.' (Bem, 1974, pps 155-162)

To what extent then, is gender schema theory as developed by Bem and others useful in helping the actor play cross-gender? Can the gender items be a useful checklist in developing the character? Can this be so, irrespective of the gender of actor and character? Is the learnt behaviour of gender typing a barrier or an aid to gender playing? How easy is it to unlearn it for the purposes of performance? And by extension how much does any kind of learnt behaviour come between the actor and the playing of the different behaviours



of a character? Does there have to be a correlation between the two?

‘Gender schema theory proposes that the phenomenon of sex typing derives, in part, from gender-based schematic processing, from a generalised readiness to process information on the basis of the sex-linked associations that constitute the gender schema. In particular, the theory proposes that sex typing results from the fact that the self-concept itself gets assimilated to the gender schema...It is speculated that such gender-based schematic processing derives, in part, from the society’s ubiquitous insistence on the functional importance of the gender dichotomy.’ (Bem, 1981, pps 354-364)

One way of looking at gender schema theory is to say that it works from the belief, as articulated by Senelick, that *all gender is performance*; that the assumption of gender is role play through learnt behaviour that is indicative of what is social acceptable behaviour for a given sex. The actor then is playing a gender when he enters the rehearsal room. His task is to play a *different* gender, but not necessarily an *opposite* one; to play a different set of gender indicators to his own. Such a task may be inhibited by an actor’s narrow self gender concept - ‘a narrowly masculine self-concept might inhibit behaviours that are stereotyped as feminine’, (Bem, p.74) and *vice versa*. That this is true would seem to be supported by the Middlesex workshops where the students often returned to a *heightened* narrow gender concept after playing their gender other.

A series of trial experiments was set up to test the possible uses of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) as a tool for the analysis of performance. Bem’s list came from asking university students to rate the desirability of 400

traits in order to find 20 adjectives characteristic of women and 20 adjectives characteristic of men. Some adjectives were not specifically applied to men or women, although they were rated as generally more or less desirable. (Bem, 1974) The aim was to be able to locate individuals along a dimension of masculinity-femininity, but was innovative in comparison to previous research in seeing masculinity and femininity as separate dimensions and not as opposite ends of a single scale. (Archer & Lloyd, 1982) Bem introduced the concept of rating individuals for their degree of androgyny, that is their combination of male identified, female identified and neutral identified characteristics. Bem's importance was in undertaking research and theorizing which questioned accepted ideology, against what Lloyd calls, 'the pervasiveness of the acceptance of "what is" as "what ought to be".' (Lloyd, 1976, p.5) The BSRI is not without limitation. It was created in 1974 on an American university campus. A new SRI created in 1997 might well be different. However one might disagree with the original attribution of gender characteristics as identified by the American students who were used to create the BSRI in 1974, the list does provide a useful, accepted, tool in analysing gender difference and role creation in actors.<sup>2</sup> The six actors in my all-female

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<sup>2</sup> Though Bem's is the most widely used, there are other such lists, including Spence's Personal Attributes Questionnaire which lists categories of Female-Valued Items, Male-Valued Items and Sex-Specific Items. (Spence *et al*, 1975)



production of Hamlet for the SOHO group were asked to use the BSRI to provide an analysis of the character they were playing and also to provide a self-analysis of their own character. This was done before rehearsal and after the production had opened. A similar experiment was done with a group of second year acting students at Middlesex University, where the students did character analysis on a series of audition pieces together with a self-analysis using the BSRI and were then asked to choose the most suitable pieces for them to use in an audition. In neither case were the actors or student actors told in advance of the nature of the research. These trials demonstrated that the BSRI was a useful tool in helping an actor make a clear and detailed analysis of character and that an actor found it no more difficult to make an analysis of themselves than of their character.

The next stage was to set up a proper controlled experiment with a company of actors in a full production. The BSRI would be used as a measure of the Gender Schemas of both actors and characters before a production, in the middle of a production and after the close of the production. A control cast would be used of actors who were cast in the same roles but did not take part in the production. Two casts then, one of which rehearsed and performed in a Shakespeare play, the other of which did not.

#### THE PLAY AND THE PRODUCTION

The play was Twelfth Night in a reduced version which I directed for the

SOHO group. There were 3 male characters and 3 female characters played by 3 male actors and 3 female actors respectively. The female characters were Maria, Olivia and Viola. The male characters were Orsino, Sir Toby Belch and Malvolio. There was no cross-gender casting. A seventh character, called ‘The Dresser’ was invented for the production. The character had no lines of dialogue and functioned as an omnipresent stage manager, always on stage, setting the scenes, handling props to actors, helping dress the other characters. This part was played by a female actor but the role had no gender specificity, the actor being allowed to create any character she chose of any gender within the confines of the play.

The control cast was chosen as a true alternative cast as similar as possible in terms of age, experience, height, physique and so on as the actors who were actually playing the parts. The control cast were as near as possible ‘twins’ to the true actors, effectively an understudy cast. The control cast were asked to complete their character analysis using only whatever prior knowledge they had of the play. The production rehearsed in London and in Deal, Kent and played in Deal, on national tour in Britain, and for a short season in London at The Tristan Bates Theatre in Covent Garden.

## THE EXPERIMENT

### Methodology and Design

The experiment had an Orthogonal Factorial Design with Between Groups



factors and Repeated Measures factors with Independent Variables (the ones chosen for the experiment such as gender) and Dependent Variables (the scores given by the actors). The actors were given copies of the BSRI and asked to tick those attributes which they felt applied to themselves and those which they felt applied to their characters. They were asked to do this at three points in the production process:

- 1) As soon as they were cast in the part.
- 2) Half way through the tour of the production.
- 3) One month after the production had finished and they were no longer playing the role.

The control cast did the same exercise at the same points.

DATE:

NAME:

CHARACTER (or SELF):

- |                                      |                                   |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Self-reliant                      | 31. Makes decisions easily        |
| 2. Yielding                          | 32. Compassionate                 |
| 3. Helpful                           | 33. Sincere                       |
| 4. Defends own beliefs               | 34. Self-sufficient               |
| 5. Cheerful                          | 35. Eager to soothe hurt feelings |
| 6. Moody                             | 36. Conceited                     |
| 7. Independent                       | 37. Dominant                      |
| 8. Shy                               | 38. Soft spoken                   |
| 9. Conscientious                     | 39. Likable                       |
| 10. Athletic                         | 40. Masculine                     |
| 11. Affectionate                     | 41. Warm                          |
| 12. Theatrical                       | 42. Solemn                        |
| 13. Assertive                        | 43. Willing to take a stand       |
| 14. Flatterable                      | 44. Tender                        |
| 15. Happy                            | 45. Friendly                      |
| 16. Strong personality               | 46. Aggressive                    |
| 17. Loyal                            | 47. Gullible                      |
| 18. Unpredictable                    | 48. Inefficient                   |
| 19. Forceful                         | 49. Acts as a leader              |
| 20. Feminine                         | 50. Childlike                     |
| 21. Reliable                         | 51. Adaptable                     |
| 22. Analytical                       | 52. Individualistic               |
| 23. Sympathetic                      | 53. Does not use harsh language   |
| 24. Jealous                          | 54. Unsystematic                  |
| 25. Has leadership qualities         | 55. Competitive                   |
| 26. Sensitive to the needs of others | 56. Loves children                |
| 27. Truthful                         | 57. Tactful                       |
| 28. Willing to take risks            | 58. Ambitious                     |
| 29. Understanding                    | 59. Gentle                        |
| 30. Secretive                        | 60. Conventional                  |

Chart 1: The BSRI as given to the actor



ITEMS ON THE MASCULINITY, FEMINITY,  
AND SOCIAL DESIRABILITY SCALES OF THE  
BSRI

**MASCULINE ITEMS**

- 49. Acts as a leader
- 46. Aggressive
- 58. Ambitious
- 22. Analytical
- 13. Assertive
- 10. Athletic
- 55. Competitive
- 4. Defends own beliefs
- 37. Dominant
- 19. Forceful
- 25. Has leadership abilities
- 7. Independent
- 52. Individualistic
- 31. Makes decisions easily
- 40. Masculine
- 1. Self-reliant
- 34. Self-sufficient
- 16. Strong personality
- 43. Willing to take a stand
- 28. Wiling to take risks

**FEMININE ITEMS**

- 11. Affectionate
- 5. Cheerful
- 50. Childlike
- 32. Compassionate
- 53. Eager not to use harsh language
- 35. Eager to soothe hurt feelings
- 20. Feminine
- 14. Flatterable
- 59. Gentle
- 47. Gullible
- 56. Loves children

- 17. Loyal
- 26. Sensitive to the needs of others
- 8. Shy
- 38. Soft spoken
- 23. Sympathetic
- 44. Tender
- 29. Understanding
- 41. Warm
- 2. Yielding

**NEUTRAL ITEMS**

- 51. Adaptable
- 36. Conceited
- 9. Conscientious
- 60. Conventional
- 45. Friendly
- 15. Happy
- 3. Helpful
- 48. Inefficient
- 24. Jealous
- 39. Likeable
- 6. Moody
- 21. Reliable
- 30. Secretive
- 33. Sincere
- 42. Solemn
- 57. Tactful
- 12. Theatrical
- 27. truthful
- 18. Unpredictable
- 54. Unsystematic

Chart 2: The BSRI as divided into gender identified items

Neither cast knew the purpose of the experiment beyond being told that it was to help with the understanding of and analysis of character. There are 60 items on the BSRI of which 20 are judged to be socially desirable masculine attributes; 20 feminine and 20 neutral.<sup>3</sup> The filling out of the questionnaire three times may itself have had a cumulative influence on the results, the answers given the first time influencing the second questionnaire and those given the second time influencing the third. The long gap between questionnaires will to some extent have mitigated against this but it should be noted that only the first questionnaire was itself completed *de novo*.

Analysis of the responses enabled assessment of two different aspects of the gender creation of character:

- 1) The relationship between the actor and the role they play as expressed by the gender schema of both. This was based on an analysis of the percentage of the total BSRI items chosen that are masculine, feminine or neutral.
- 2) The complexity of the character played in relation to the self-judged complexity of the actor. This was based on an analysis of the total number of items from the BSRI chosen in each case.

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<sup>3</sup> These items are very similar to the list of character actions one would use in training actors in the methods of Stanislavski and Michael Chekov (probably the dominant acting teaching method employed in English speaking drama schools) where every objective of a character is described by the use of an active verb. The adjectives on the BSRI all have their active verbal equivalent, e.g. to assert, to yield, to help.



The responses allowed for a more detailed analysis based on which individual items were chosen and the degree of consistency in that choice, e.g. did an actor see themselves or their character as ‘adaptable’ at all three points in the production?

### Terminology

The points at which the actors were asked to complete the BSRI are termed ‘pre-production’, ‘mid-production’ and ‘post-production’. The number of items chosen by an actor from the index to describe themselves and their character are termed the ‘self-personality-complexity’ rating and the ‘character-personality-complexity’ rating. In analysing the results, I first looked at these personality-complexity ratings, looking at the way in which the personality of the actor related to that of the character portrayed before moving on to look at the specific area of gender construction.

### Analysis of the results

Pre-production all the actors, with only one exception, chose more items to describe themselves than to describe their characters. The differences were very marked. For the female actors there was also a strong degree of consistency. The actor playing Maria chose 35 items to describe herself and 28 to describe her character; the actress playing Olivia 26 and 19; the Viola actress 30 and 22. The male actors showed more variability. The actor playing Sir Toby chose 31 items to describe himself and 20 for his character; the

Malvolio actor 23 and 19; but the Orsino actor was the only member of the cast to choose more items to describe his character (28) than himself (26). The widest margin was for the actor playing The Dresser, a character who existed only conceptually. She chose 38 items to describe herself against only 25 to describe the character.

The figures were analysed statistically by computer using analysis of variance and to confirm that what *appeared* to be the case, actually *was* the case. In the tables below the key column is that giving the P-value, that is the PROBABILITY value. Any P-value of less than .05 is of statistical significance; .05 indicates a 1 in 20 chance of statistical probability. The data were subjected to a 2 x 2 x 2 (A x B x C) analysis of variance (ANOVA) with gender (female vs. male) and group (experiment vs. control) as independent group factors and category (self vs. character) as repeated measures factor. The results of the ANOVA are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.



ANOVA Table for analysis

	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F-Value	P-Value
gender	1	66.667	66.667	2.504	.1522
group	1	6.000	6.000	.225	.6477
gender * group	1	8.167	8.167	.307	.5948
Subject(Group)	8	213.000	26.625		
Category for analysis	1	416.667	416.667	34.364	.0004
Category for analysis * gen...	1	20.167	20.167	1.663	.2332
Category for analysis * gro...	1	20.167	20.167	1.663	.2332
Category for analysis * gen...	1	6.000	6.000	.495	.5017
Category for analysis * Su...	8	97.000	12.125		

Means Table for analysis

Effect: Category for analysis \* gender \* group

	Count	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Err.
f, control, self-analysis	3	35.333	3.055	1.764
f, control, char-analysis	3	22.333	6.658	3.844
f, exptl, self-analysis	3	30.333	4.509	2.603
f, exptl, char-analysis	3	23.000	4.583	2.646
m, control, self-analysis	3	28.000	4.359	2.517
m, control, char-analysis	3	20.667	3.215	1.856
m, exptl, self-analysis	3	27.333	4.041	2.333
m, exptl, char-analysis	3	21.667	3.786	2.186

TABLE 1

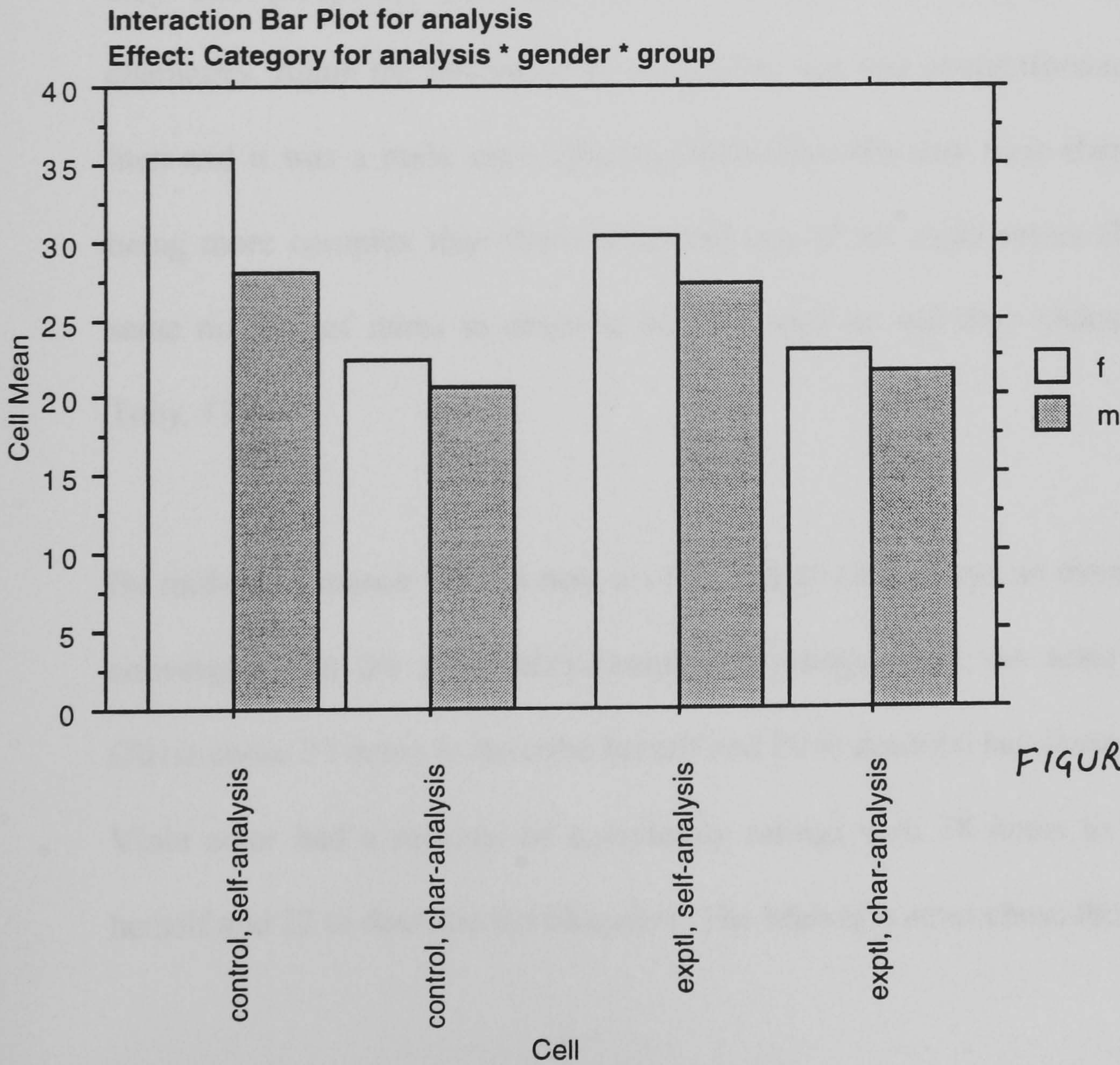


FIGURE 1



The data analysis indicates that:

- actors at the start of a rehearsal process see themselves as more complex than the characters that they are to play. ( $F(1,8) = 34.36$ ,  $P = .0004$ )
- that female actors show a greater divergence between the view of their characters and their view of themselves than male actors. (although this was not statistically significant:  $F(1,8) = 2.5$ ,  $p = .15$ , but will be seen to be of significance in the final statistical analysis)
- The Dresser (a female) had a difference of  $38 - 25 = 13$  points between self and character analysis. The control females had an average difference of 13 points ( $35.33 - 22.33$ ) between self and character analysis.

The control group confirm these conclusions. Here all the actors, again with only one exception, saw themselves as being more complex than their characters. Again the difference in complexity was less straightforward in the men and it was a male actor (playing Malvolio) who saw their character as being more complex than themselves and one of the male actors chose the same number of items to describe both themselves and their character (Sir Toby, 17).

By mid-performance we can note a very marked change and an overall close convergence in the personality-complexity ratings. Here the actor playing Olivia chose 22 items to describe herself and 20 to describe her character. The Viola actor had a reversal of complexity ratings with 18 items to describe herself and 22 to describe her character. The Malvolio actor chose the same



number of items (26) for both himself and his character and the Orsino actor continued, by a margin of 1, to see himself as less complex than his character (31 to 32). It was only the actors playing Maria and Sir Toby for whom the margin widened with these actors seeing their characters as less complex than before rehearsals started: 37 to 24 against 35 to 28 before rehearsals for Maria and 29 to 16 against 31 to 20 before rehearsals for Sir Toby. Maria and Sir Toby were the two 'comic' characters in the production and shared most of their scenes on stage with one another. They therefore had to some extent reached a shared view of their characters. These data were subjected to a 2 x 2 x 2 analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results are shown in Table 2 and Figure 2.



ANOVA Table for mid-analysis

	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F-Value	P-Value
gender	1	.375	.375	5.556E-3	.9424
group	1	.042	.042	6.173E-4	.9808
gender * group	1	57.042	57.042	.845	.3848
Subject(Group)	8	540.000	67.500		
Category for mid-analysis	1	247.042	247.042	8.618	.0188
Category for mid-analysis ...	1	40.042	40.042	1.397	.2712
Category for mid-analysis ...	1	40.042	40.042	1.397	.2712
Category for mid-analysis ...	1	35.042	35.042	1.222	.3010
Category for mid-analysis ...	8	229.333	28.667		

gen  
gp  
gender \* gp.

Means Table for mid-analysis  
Effect: Category for mid-analysis \* gender \* group

	Count	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Err.
f, control, self	3	29.000	6.928	4.000
f, control, char	3	25.000	2.646	1.528
f, exptl, self	3	25.667	10.017	5.783
f, exptl, char	3	22.000	2.000	1.155
m, control, self	3	30.667	10.970	6.333
m, control, char	3	16.667	5.774	3.333
m, exptl, self	3	28.667	2.517	1.453
m, exptl, char	3	24.667	8.083	4.667

TABLE 2

Interaction Bar Plot for mid-analysis  
Effect: Category for mid-analysis \* gender \* group

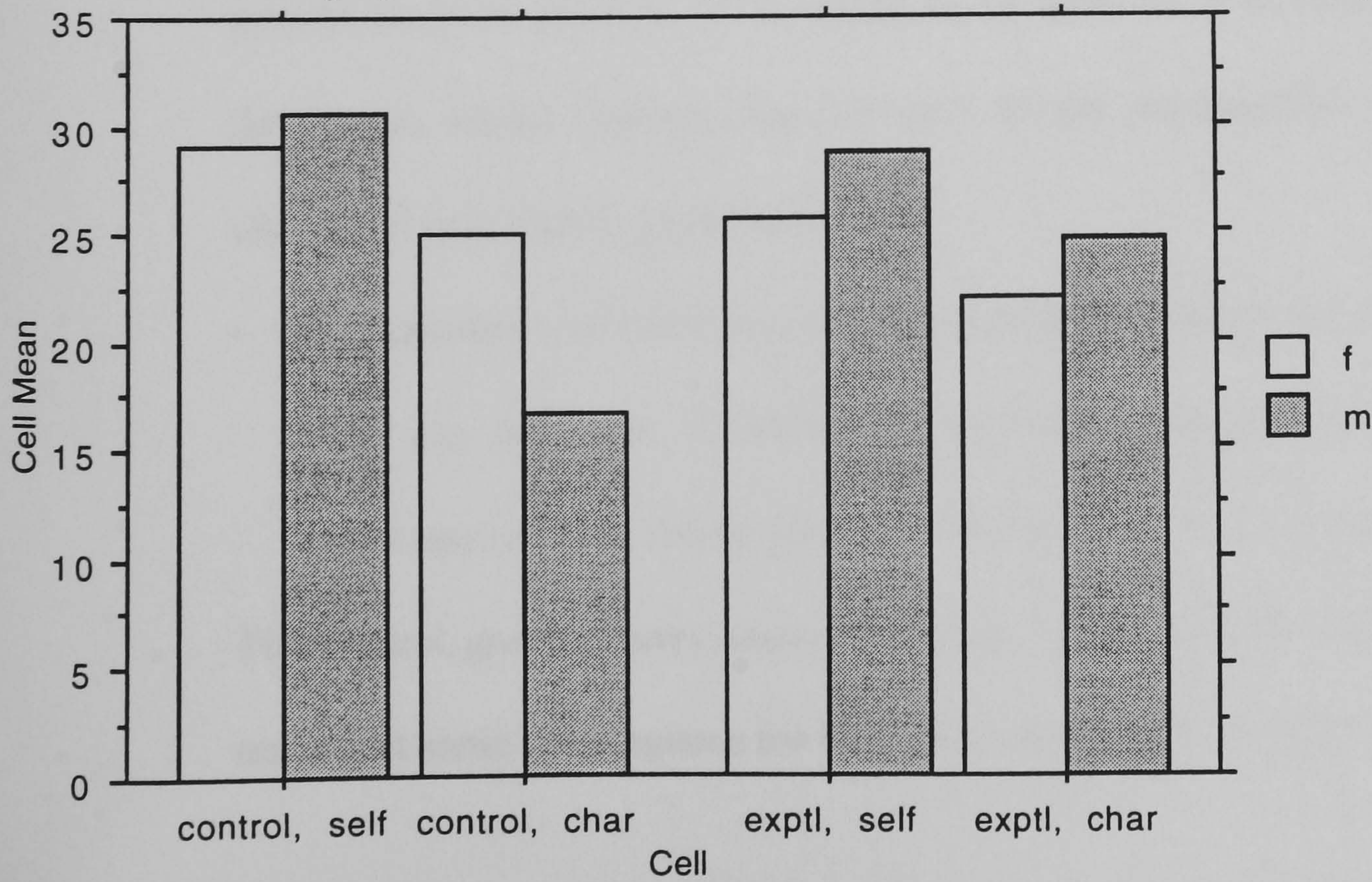


FIGURE 2



From these analyses we can conclude that

- an actor's view of the complexity of the character they are playing tends to converge with their view of their own personality whilst playing that role. However the self vs. character complexity scores were still significantly different (  $F(1,8) = 8.618, p = .018$  )
- Although numbers were too small to demonstrate statistically, where an actor is playing a comic character then the character will be seen as being less complex as a result of the rehearsal and performances.

The imagined character of The Dresser shows a complete complexity reversal. Whereas before rehearsal the actor had seen herself as being very much more complex than her character (38 items to 25), in mid-performance the figures were almost exactly reversed (28 items to 40) indicating that,

- in a devised performance, a self-created character can 'take over' the personality of the actor.

Together with the fact that the Viola actor showed a similar but less extreme pattern (from 30 items to 22 reversing to 18 items to 22 in mid-performance) the figures would indicate that not only do the personalities of actors and characters converge in performance but

- the personality of the character played as perceived by the actor can 'take over' (or dominate, overshadow) the self-perceived personality of the actor: convergence can be passed to become reverse divergence.

The control group figures show divergence between actor and character for males but some convergence for females. However this interaction effect was

not statistically significant.

A month after the production, the complexity factors are again reversed and with only two exceptions all the actors now saw themselves as again having more complex personalities than their characters. The exceptions were the Orsino actor who maintained his consistent view of his character as being marginally more complex than himself (31 items to 32) and the Malvolio actor who maintained a factor rating of 26 for his character but reduced his own rating to 22. The other male actor, playing Sir Toby, returned to a self-rating of 31 but saw his character as considerably more complex after he had played him than during the run at 24 post-production against 20 pre-production and 16 mid-production.

Again it is the female actors who demonstrate a consistency of self and character perception, not so much supporting Alexander Pope's view that 'women have no characters at all.' (Pope, p.46) as showing that, as actors, they absorb them in the roles they are playing. The Maria and Viola actors have almost exactly returned to their starting positions pre-production. The Maria actor completes her journey with 36 self items and 28 character items post-performance compared to 35 self items and 28 character items pre-performance. The Viola actor completes her journey with 31 self items and 21 character items post -production compared to 30 self and 22 character pre-production. The Olivia actor has not returned to her initial



self-personality-complexity rating: 26 self to 19 character pre-production to 20 self to 17 character post production. We shall see later how these figures bear a direct relation to the actor's gender construct. The Dresser returns to something close to her original self-personality-complexity rating of 35 items and something close to a mean rating for her character of 31 (against 25 pre- and 40 mid-production).

A 2 x 2 x 3 ANOVA was conducted on the self-character scores. This score provided an index of how much convergence or divergence there was between the self rating and the character rating over the three sessions. The results are shown in Table 3 and Figure 3.

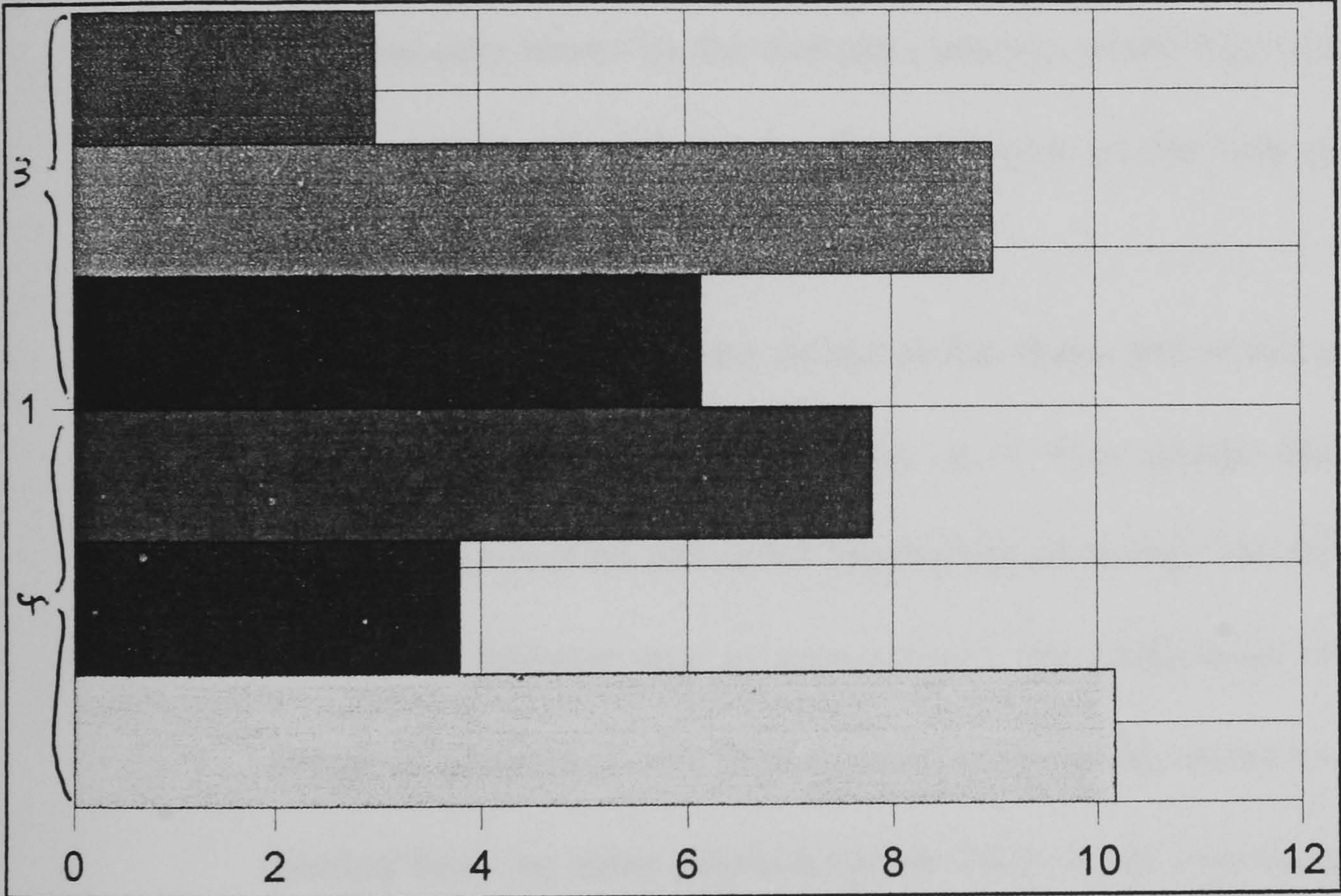


Table 3: Convergence [Self-Character] Scores

ANOVA Table for convergence

	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F-Value	P-Value
gender	1	14.694	14.694	.220	.6517
group	1	117.361	117.361	1.755	.2218
gender * group	1	38.028	38.028	.569	.4724
Subject(Group)	8	534.889	66.861		
Category for Untitled Comp...	2	44.056	22.028	1.200	.3270
Category for Untitled Comp...	2	188.389	94.194	5.130	.0190
Category for Untitled Comp...	2	19.056	9.528	.519	.6048
Category for Untitled Comp...	2	67.389	33.694	1.835	.1916
Category for Untitled Comp...	16	293.778	18.361		

N.s. session  
gender x session  
group x session  
gender x group  
x session



Interaction Bar Plot for convergence  
Session x Gender interaction

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Means Table for Convergence				
2	Effect: Category for Untitled Compact Variable#1 * gender * group				
3					
4		Count	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Err.
5	f. pre	6	10.17	4.56	2.63
6	f. mid	6	3.80	8.40	4.85
7	f. post	6	7.80	2.11	1.22
8	m. pre	6	6.15	1.37	1.37
9	m. mid	6	9.00	6.50	3.75
10	m. post	6	3.00	6.53	3.77



Here we come up with much the most significant finding of the research showing the convergence (self-character) scores of the actors in the true and control casts combined. The figures show that in a gender x session analysis of the data, male actors differ significantly from female actors in the way in which they relate to their characters.

- female actors converge their own personality scores with those of their characters .
- male actors diverge their personality scores from those of their characters.

This was only shown by the computer analysis of the figures and shows that

- the gender of an actor is of significance in the way in which an actor relates to a role.

This goes to the heart of the debate in this thesis and would seem to show that the importance of gender in casting or in cross gender casting is not just a matter of convention but of the psychology of acting. The female actors act in an entirely different way to male actors.<sup>4</sup> The implication of this is discussed below in Chapter 9. The assumptions made by the directors above may have limited basis in actor psychology but there is an important conclusion here about the uniformity of acting methodology in a single gender casting which is different in a bi-gender cast. There is room here for more research in this area with a much larger number of actors, perhaps in several different shows

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<sup>4</sup> If we were to add the Dresser into the analysis the figures would show this convergence of female actors to character even more strongly.

simultaneously using the BSRI or a variant of it to analyse actor/character complexity rating with a large sample pre- and mid- production.<sup>5</sup>

What this experiment does not tell us is how long this relationship between actor and character continues. A month after the production the character is still very much with the actor and to some extent must residually (as with human relationships) be with the actor their entire career. But other characters will intervene and create other actor/character relationships. Neither can we know what the relationship between actor and character would be before casting - before the two have met so to speak - because casting is the start of the relationship and can be the only starting point of the experiment. There may be other, unrecorded, factors which affect the results of the experiment:

- other characters recently played by the actor.
- the inter-relationship of the characters in the production.
- the inter-relationship of the actors outside of the production.

and with the control cast:

- whether the actors saw this or any other production during the experiment.
- whether the actors were playing other characters in other plays.

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<sup>5</sup> An executive of the Shell company with whom I was running workshops, told me that a similar process of identification happens between an individual and a company. One could undertake a similar experiment using the BSRI or an equivalent for employee and company.



The central findings of the experiment so far is that an actor's personality, as self-analysed, is a malleable thing, able to be adjusted by the actor themselves in response to the contours of the personality of the character created: that the details on the human mask of the actor will converge with those on the mask of the character if the actor is female but diverge from those on the mask of the character if the actor is male.<sup>6</sup>

Having looked at some of the general points about actor/character relationships raised by this experiment, let us now look at how this relationship is expressed in the specifics of the performance of gender.

At the start of rehearsals there appears to be no clear correspondence between the gender of the actor and the gender of the character as expressed by the relative percentages of items chosen from the BSRI. There is no clear pattern of relationship at that point. The Maria actor rates herself as 34% male, 34% female and 32% neutral and her character as 50% male, 16% female and 32% neutral. The figures for the Olivia actor are 35% male, 36% female and 26% neutral against a character rating of 42% male, 21% female and 37% neutral. For the Viola actor the figures are 50% male, 27% female and 23% neutral

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<sup>6</sup> Perhaps another question should have been asked of the actors: How *comfortable* do you find playing the character (on a bi-polar scale of one to ten say). In other words do you, as Hamlet says of the Player King, 'force your soul so to your own conceit'?

against character ratings of 41% male, 32% female and 27% neutral. There is not even a regular correspondence as to which gender is the dominant one in either actor or character.

A similar lack of pattern appears with the male actors. The Malvolio actor rates himself as 22% male, 39% female and 39% neutral and his character as 32% male, 16% female and 52% neutral. For the Orsino actor the ratings are 27% male, 46% female and 27% neutral against a character rating of 39% male, 29% female and 32% neutral. The Sir Toby actor rates himself 20% male, 39% female and 35% neutral against a character rating of 50% male, 20% female and 30% neutral. But there is here a clear pattern that was not true of the female actors. What is striking is that all the male actors saw themselves as predominantly female while seeing their characters as predominantly male. The female actor playing the Dresser shows herself the reverse of this pattern, rating herself as 45% male and her (yet to be constructed) character as 48% female.

If we look at the control cast however, a very clear pattern presents itself. All the female actors rate themselves as predominantly female and their characters as predominantly male. This Maria actor is 29% male, 34% female and 37% neutral and her character 46% male, 35% female and 21% neutral. The Olivia actor is 23% male, 45% female and 32% neutral and her character 36% male, 36% female and 28% neutral. The Viola actor is 14% male, 50%



female and 36% neutral and her character 53% male, 13% female and 34% neutral.

For the male actors in the control group a similar pattern emerges. All rate themselves as primarily male but their characters as primarily male as well. So the Malvolio actor's self rating is 35% male, 35% female and 30% neutral and his character is 64% male, 13% female and 23% neutral. the Orsino actor is 38% male, 31% female and 31% neutral and his character 65% male, 9% female and 26% neutral. The Sir Toby actor is 54% male, 23% female and 23% neutral and his character 47% male, 18% female and 35% neutral.

If we follow the control cast through the stages of the experiment we find that the pattern (with one exception) does not change. The female actors continue to rate themselves as primarily female: in the middle of the run 38% for the Maria actor, 44% for the Olivia actor and 52% for the Viola actor, and their characters as primarily male: 42% for Maria, 42% for Olivia and - this is the exception - 26% for Viola. The exception returns to type for the post production set of figures. Here the actors self ratings are again all primarily female (Maria 37%, Olivia 33% and Viola 46%) and their characters primarily male (Maria 48%, Olivia 65% and Viola 64%).

The male actors in the control group also continue the pattern established in the first set of figures, rating themselves as primarily male and their characters

as also primarily male. In the middle of the run the Malvolio is 37% male, his character 35% male; the Orsino actor is 37% male and his character 60% male; and the Sir Toby actor is 55% male and his character 60% male. At the end of the run the Malvolio actor is 36% male, his character 47% male; the Orsino actor is 36% male and his character 59% male; and the Sir Toby actor 56% male and his character 48% male.

From the control cast we can conclude that:

- an actor who is not acting in a play ( a ‘resting’ actor ) identifies themselves with the gender that corresponds with their biological sex.

This reflects the gender classification that is the basis of all casting. Spotlight, the directory that contains photographs of every British actor, divides itself into separate gender specific volumes to cover ‘Actors’ and ‘Actresses’ and these are divided into sub-divisions of Young Actors/Actresses, Leading Actors/Actresses, Younger Character Actors/Actresses, Character Actors/Actresses. Clear gender identification is therefore a key factor in an actor’s ability to market themselves. Lack of gender clarity is not allowed for in the structure of the casting system. Correspondingly a casting breakdown of characters from the weekly Script Breakdown Service which sends details of all current castings to actors’ agents, will itemise the sex of the character before anything else.

We can also conclude from the control cast that:



- Actors (irrespective of their sex) identify characters (irrespective of their sex) as being predominantly male in their Gender Schemas.

This is more difficult to explain but is perhaps to do with the *active* nature of most of the male items on the BSRI. A potential part, a character that one might be asked to play, is always viewed by an actor as the *active* alternative to the *passive* nature of being an out of work actor.

Returning to the ‘true’ cast, we find that though there was no clear pattern of gender identification at the start of rehearsal, this lack of pattern is in itself significant for it shows that:

- Once cast in a part, an actor opens the possibility of gender flexibility/ambiguity in both themselves and their character.

This confirms the findings on character complexity where we saw the malleability of the character of both actor and character as being a key factor in the process of acting and creation of character. The figures above would indicate that *in regard to gender*, such malleability begins the moment an actor is cast in a role.<sup>7</sup>

If we follow each actor individually through the period of the experiment we

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<sup>7</sup> The actor Tom Baker (a member of Olivier’s National Theatre Company, though now best known as for the role of Dr. Who on television) writes in his autobiography of ‘the incomplete personality’ of the actor who has ‘any assurance at all ... only in the enclosed asylum of the play’. (Baker, p.171)

can see the degree to which the gender identity of the actor and that of the character is a fluid thing and the degree to which one gender construct relates to another.

For the Maria actor the gender journey of the actor is a modest one. At the start of rehearsals she is 34% male, 34% female and 32% neutral, an almost perfect androgyny balanced make-up. In the middle of the run the neutrality has shifted in equal proportions to male and female at 35% male, 35% female and 30% neutral. After the production the actor exhibits a predominantly male make-up at 36% male, 33% female and 31% neutral. The journey of her character is from dominant masculinity (50% male, 18% female, 32% neutral) to increased male dominance (58% male, 13% female, 29% neutral) to a return to a point closer to the start (52% male, 19% female, 29% neutral).

The Olivia actor makes a gender journey that finds her becoming steadily more masculine identified over the period of the experiment from 35% male, 38% female and 27% neutral to 36% male, 32% female, 32% neutral, finishing at 45% male, 25% female, 30% neutral. Her character's journey follows a similar path but is more extreme starting at 42% male, 21% female and 37% neutral, moving to 65% male, 20% female and 15% neutral and finishing at 76% male, 12% female and 12% neutral.

The Viola actor makes a gender journey that finds her starting from a strongly



masculine position to becoming even more masculine during the production but returning to a position close to her original level of masculinity after the production. On casting the actor is 50% male, 27% female and 23% neutral, moving to 67% male, 22% female and 11% neutral in the middle of the run and returning to 48% male, 29% female and 23% neutral after the run. Her character's journey is a mirror of that of the Olivia character. Where Olivia became increasingly male, Viola became increasingly female through the whole process, starting at 41% male, 32% female and 27% neutral, moving to 7% male, 41% female and 27% neutral and finishing at 14% male, 53% female and 34% neutral.

The male actors defined their characters (as did the female actors) as primarily male at the start of rehearsals, but characterised themselves as primarily female. Only in one case, the Malvolio actor, did the character increase its masculinity rating in performance. For the Orsino and Sir Toby actors, the masculinity ratings of the characters decreased in performance and their femininity ratings increased.

The Malvolio actor rated his character at the start of rehearsals as 32% male, 16% female and 52% neutral. In the middle of the run this became 54% male, 11% female and 35% neutral. After the production the gender ratings only slightly modified to 50% male, 12% female and 38% neutral. The actor's personal journey shows a different pattern from 22% male, 39% female and

39% neutral at the start of rehearsal to 19% male, 38% female and 43% neutral in the middle of the run but to 32% male, 27% female and 41% neutral after the production.

The journey of the Orsino actor also shows the most movement after the production. He moves from 27% male, 46% female and 27% neutral at the start of rehearsals, to 26% male, 42% female, 32% neutral in the middle of the run to 32% male, 32% female and 36% neutral after the production, finishing in a state of gender balance. His character meanwhile moved to a state of gender balance in the middle of the run and returned closer to his starting point: from 39% male, 29% female and 32% neutral at the start of rehearsals to 34% male, 34% female and 32% neutral in the middle of the run to 44% male, 25% female and 31% neutral after the production.

The Sir Toby actor made a personal gender journey that saw much less variation from 20% male, 39% female and 35% neutral at the start of rehearsal to 24% male, 45% female and 31% neutral in the middle of the run to 27% male, 43% female and 30% neutral after the performance. His character however showed a steady decrease in it male ratings from 50% male, 20% female, 30% neutral at the start of rehearsals, to 44% male, 21% female and 35% neutral in the middle of the run to 42% male, 25% female and 33% neutral after the production.



The figures show that:

- an actor's view of their personal gender is altered in relationship to their changing views of the gender of their character.
- an actor playing a role has a less fixed view of their personal gender than an actor who is not playing a role.
- the process of playing a role on stage can alter an actor's view of their own gender *after* a production has finished.
- an actor identifies their own gender construct in relationship to the part most recently played.
- an actor always thinks of their character as being primarily male in gender irrespective of the biological sex of either actor or character.
- a male actor will view their own gender as primarily female when playing a male character

We do not know whether the reverse is true and that a male actor would view their own gender as primarily male while playing a female character or whether the same pattern would be true of a female actor.

There was one exception to these patterns and that was the actor playing the dresser. While she too saw her personal gender ratings change after the production from those at the start of rehearsals (moving from 45% male, 29% female and 26% neutral at the start of rehearsal to 50% male, 29% female, 21% neutral in the middle of the run to 43% male, 37% female and 20% neutral after the production) her character had a very different journey to the

others. At the start of rehearsals the Dresser was the only character to be rated as predominantly female, and by a wide margin: 8% male, 48% female, 44% neutral. In the middle of the run the character was clearly rated as predominantly male at 45% male, 32% female and 23% neutral, a spectacular reverse. After the production the male predominance increased further to 52% male, 19% female and 31% neutral. The actor playing the Dresser had no rôle before rehearsals started: or rather she was able to play any rôle she pleased. With no clear rôle, the actor (though herself female) saw the *absence* of character as being female. Once the rôle was established in performance, the *presence* of character was seen by the actor as male.

Barba writes of cross-gender performance as the adoption of disguise, a contrast between reality and fiction in which, 'lies hidden one of the theatre's secret potentialities.' (Barba, 1995, p.61) This research using Gender Schema Theory shows that the secret potentialities hidden within the performance of gender are more subtle and complex than simple disguise. Acting cross-gender is not the playing of one gender as a disguise to cover another but is about the mutability of actor and rôle where the gender schemata of both adapt to one another and where male and female are not alternatives but combine in the perception of gender schemata by the actor. The Gender Schema research also reveals the hidden secret, and this is a fundamental discovery. that women act differently to men. The next part of the research examines the audience perceives actor, rôle and gender.



Chapter Seven

Chart 3

Pre-production

True Cast

	Self Analysis				Character Analysis			
	%M	%F	%N	No.	%M	% F	%N	No.
The Dresser	45	29	26	38	8	48	44	25
Maria	34	34	32	35	50	18	32	28
Olivia	35	38	27	26	42	21	37	19
Viola	50	27	23	30	41	32	27	22
Female Average	41	32	27	32	35	28	25	23
Female average without Dresser	40	33	27	30	44	24	32	23
Malvolio	22	39	39	23	32	16	52	19
Orsino	27	46	27	26	39	29	32	28
Sir Toby	26	39	35	31	50	20	30	20
Male average	25	41	34	27	40	22	38	22
total average	33	37	31	30	38	25	32	23

**Key:**

%M is the percentage of total items chosen that are masculine identified.

%F is the percentage of total items chosen that are feminine identified.

% N is the percentage of total items chosen that are gender neutral.

No. is the total number of items chosen

Chapter Seven

Chart 4

Pre-production

Control Cast

	Self Analysis				Character Analysis			
	%M	%F	%N	No.	%M	% F	%N	No.
Maria	29	34	37	38	46	33	21	24
Olivia	23	45	32	31	36	36	28	28
Viola	14	50	36	22	53	13	34	15
Female Average	22	43	35	30	45	27	28	22
Malvolio	35	35	30	20	64	13	23	22
Orsino	38	31	31	32	65	9	26	23
Sir Toby	54	23	23	17	47	18	35	17
Male average	42	30	28	23	59	13	28	20
total average	42	30	28	23	59	13	28	20

**Key:**

%M is the percentage of total items chosen that are masculine identified.  
%F is the percentage of total items chosen that are feminine identified.  
% N is the percentage of total items chosen that are gender neutral.  
No. is the total number of items chosen



Chapter Seven

Chart 5

Mid-production

True Cast

	Self Analysis				Character Analysis			
	%M	%F	%N	No.	%M	% F	%N	No.
The Dresser	50	29	21	28	45	32	23	40
Maria	35	35	30	37	58	13	29	24
Olivia	36	32	32	22	65	20	15	20
Viola	67	22	11	18	7	41	27	22
Female Average	47	29	23	26	44	26	23	26
Female average without Dresser	63	39	31	35	58	35	31	35
Malvolio	19	38	43	26	54	11	35	26
Orsino	26	42	32	31	34	34	32	32
Sir Toby	24	45	31	29	44	21	35	25
Male average	23	42	35	29	44	33	35	25
total average	35	36	29	28	44	24	29	26

**Key:**

%M is the percentage of total items chosen that are masculine identified.

%F is the percentage of total items chosen that are feminine identified.

% N is the percentage of total items chosen that are gender neutral.

No. is the total number of items chosen

## Chapter Seven

## Chart 6

Mid-productionControl Cast

	Self Analysis				Character Analysis			
	%M	%F	%N	No.	%M	% F	%N	No.
Maria	30	38	32	37	42	29	29	24
Olivia	20	44	36	25	42	29	29	28
Viola	16	52	32	25	26	30	44	23
Female Average	22	45	33	29	37	29	34	25
Malvolio	37	26	37	27	35	10	35	20
Orsino	37	26	37	30	60	15	25	20
Sir Toby	55	27	18	22	60	10	30	10
Male average	43	26	31	26	52	12	30	17
total average	33	36	32	28	45	21	32	21

**Key:**

%M is the percentage of total items chosen that are masculine identified.

%F is the percentage of total items chosen that are feminine identified.

% N is the percentage of total items chosen that are gender neutral.

No. is the total number of items chosen



Chapter Seven

Chart 7

Post-production

True Cast

	Self Analysis				Character Analysis			
	%M	%F	%N	No.	%M	% F	%N	No.
The Dresser	43	37	20	35	52	19	29	31
Maria	36	33	31	36	47	14	39	28
Olivia	45	25	30	20	76	12	12	17
Viola	48	29	23	31	14	53	34	21
Female Average	43	31	26	31	47	25	29	24
Female average without Dresser	43	29	28	29	46	26	28	22
Malvolio	32	27	41	22	50	12	38	26
Orsino	32	32	36	31	44	25	31	32
Sir Toby	27	43	30	30	42	25	33	24
Male average	30	34	36	28	45	21	34	27
total average	37	33	31	29	46	23	31	26

**Key:**

%M is the percentage of total items chosen that are masculine identified.  
%F is the percentage of total items chosen that are feminine identified.  
% N is the percentage of total items chosen that are gender neutral.  
No. is the total number of items chosen

Chapter Seven

Chart 8

Post-production

Control Cast

	Self Analysis				Character Analysis			
	%M	%F	%N	No.	%M	% F	%N	No.
Maria	29	37	34	35	48	26	26	27
Olivia	33	33	33	24	65	15	20	20
Viola	21	46	33	24	64	22	14	14
Female Average	28	39	33	28	59	21	20	20
Malvolio	36	24	40	25	47	18	35	17
Orsino	36	28	36	33	59	9	32	22
Sir Toby	56	22	22	18	48	14	38	21
Male average	43	25	33	25	51	14	35	20
total average	35	32	33	27	55	18	28	20

**Key:**

%M is the percentage of total items chosen that are masculine identified.  
%F is the percentage of total items chosen that are feminine identified.  
% N is the percentage of total items chosen that are gender neutral.  
No. is the total number of items chosen



## CHAPTER 8

It is to the character of Rosalind in As You Like It that much of the discussion of cross-cast performance in Shakespeare constantly returns. She is, as Garber says, 'the shorthand term for benign female-to-male cross-dressing in literature and culture.' (Garber p. 76). Garber argues that this is because 'she returns to the stage dressed as a woman' - uniquely amongst Shakespeare's cross-dressed heroines. Additionally, in the Epilogue, itself unique in Shakespearean comedy, she draws attention to her own base-gender as an actor:

'If I were a woman, I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me, and breaths that defied not; and I am sure, as many of you as have good beards, or good faces, or sweet breaths, will, for my kind offer, when I make curtsy, bid me farewell.' (As You Like It V.iv.214-7)

Théophile Gautier's Mademoiselle de Maupin is both a version of As You Like It and a novel which contains a staging of the play. Although the novel was shocking in its time, because it is a *novel* and not a *play*, the audience/reader is not so easily a party to the deception so can themselves be deceived. It is much more difficult to deceive an audience of a play in the same way because there is a shared complicity in the suspension of disbelief and the establishment of conventions on the stage. The novel also deals with the myth of Hermes and Aphrodite - the union that created the Hermaphrodite. Gautier believes, as did the Greeks, that 'beauty may be loved independently of sex, for itself alone. (Joanna Richardson, introduction to Gautier, p.9)



Richardson describes the novel as, ‘a version of As You Like It written with all the naïveté of a Romantic in his early twenties.’ (*ibid* p.9) Gautier deals with the ambiguities in a very different way from Shakespeare and also has a freedom to confuse the reader which is denied (or perhaps not sought) by the playwright, partly by exploiting the first and third person narratives:

‘the master was as beautiful as a woman, the page was as beautiful as a young girl....two or three buttons on the jerkin had been undone to make breathing easier, and they allowed one to glimpse, through the gap in the fine linen shirt, a lozenge of plump and buxom flesh of admirable whiteness, and the beginning of a curve which was difficult to explain on the breast of a young boy; if you looked closely, you might also have found that the hips were a little too developed. The reader may think what he likes; these are mere conjectures which we offer him; we know no more than he does, but we hope to learn more in a while, and we promise to keep him faithfully informed of our discoveries. if the reader is less short-sighted than we are, let him cast his eyes under the lace of that shirt and decide honestly whether that curve is too rounded or not; but we warn him that the curtains are drawn, and the light of the room is subdued. This doesn’t at all help this kind of investigation.’  
(Gautier, p.149)

And when the story returns to the first person:

‘It is the most deplorable of aberrations, I can’t begin to understand it, I don’t comprehend it in the least, everything in me is upside-down and in confusion; I no longer know who I am, or what others are, I wonder if I’m a man or a woman, I have a horror of myself, I feel singular and inexplicable urges....I tried to unravel this tangled skein which had become caught up in my soul. At last, through the veils which shrouded it, I discovered the appalling truth...Silvio, I love...Oh, no, I could never tell you...I love a man!...Théodore must be a woman in disguise; otherwise the thing is impossible. That beauty is excessive, even for a woman. It is not the beauty of a man....It is a woman, I am sure, and I am quite mad to have tormented myself like this. Everything can be explained in the most natural way in the world, and I am not such a monster as I thought....It is indeed among the most subtle creations of the pagan genius, this son of Hermes and Aphrodite. You can’t imagine anything more ravishing in the world



than these two bodies, both of them perfect, harmoniously fused together: these two beauties so equal and so different, which now form only one which is superior to them both, because the moderate and set off each other....What is remarkable is that I hardly think about his sex any more, and that I love him with perfect confidence....Since everybody called me sir, and I was treated as a man, I gradually forgot that I was a woman. My disguise seemed to me to be my ordinary dress, and I didn't recall ever wearing anything else; I no longer thought that I was in fact just a little hare-brained creature who had made a sword out of her needle, and a pair of breeches by cutting up her skirt....Men are more feminine than I am. I have hardly anything of a woman except her breasts, a few more rounded lines, and more delicate hands; the skirt is on my hips and not in my minds. It often happens that the sex of the soul is not the same as that of the body, and this contradiction cannot fail to produced a great deal of confusion.' (Gautier, pps 181-273)

For the playwright the opportunities for deception are more limited and the audience is aware of the deception throughout the story. But although Shakespeare did not have the opportunity to move between the first and third person, something similar occurs in the epilogue where, as Garber argues:

'“She’ deliberately breaks the frame to acknowledge the ‘real’ gender of the actor....and by calling attention to her underlying male ‘identity’ as an actor (‘If I were a woman’) Rosalind opens up the possibility of a male/male homoeroticism between male audience members and male actor that is the counterpart of the male/’male’ homoeroticism animating Orlando’s conversations with Ganymede, as well as the converse of the female/female homoeroticism figured in the play by Phoebe’s infatuation.’ (Garber p.76).

How much of this does an audience notice? To what extent is an audience aware of the gender character construct of the actor? How much can an audience see through the character gender mask to see the base gender mask beneath? To what extent does an audience *de-construct*? To what extent is the audience *complicite* in the construction of the gender of that character as it

would be with the construction of gender in social terms? For as Barba observes, 'the theatre's raw material is not the actor, nor the text, but the attention, the seeing, the hearing, the mind of the spectator. Theatre is the art of the spectator.' (Barba, 1995, p.39) Barba argues that the 'action' of the actor has no meaning of its own, but that 'meaning is always the fruit of a convention, a relationship. The very fact that the performer-spectator relationship exists implies that meanings will be produced. The point is whether or not one wishes to programme *which specific meanings* must germinate in the spectator's mind.' (Barba, 1995, p.104) This programming, this working of conventions, is the job of the director not of the actor. For Barba, 'it is obvious that the performer can work on his/her actions (diction, tonality, volume, bearing, stance, intensity) without thinking about what s/he will want to transmit to the spectator once the process is completed.' (Barba, 1995, p.105)

The belief of most of the directors responsible for cross-gender cast performances interviewed for this thesis (Havergal, Robertson above) is that an audience is not aware of the gender of the actor, or becomes unaware of that gender, instead only being aware of the gender of the character. Yet these directors would also argue that single actor gender casting allows greater freedom in exploring issues of emotion and sexual violence in the plays. Are they right in those assumptions? To what extent is the convention (or in Barba's words the relationship) a long term relationship or to what extent is it



created anew with each production?

It is never possible for an actor or director to know what an audience sees, although the work of both is dependent upon assumptions about audience perception and the ability of actor and director in Barba's phrase to 'programme' specific meanings in an audience's mind. What a director and an actor can have some idea of is audience *reaction*, primarily as expressed through applause. Reaction of individual members of the audience can be judged through verbal comment, criticism and so on. There has been some research into audience reaction. As Wilson summarises:

'Amongst the methods used to study spectator variables in the theatre have been rating scales (e.g. bipolar adjectives), psychophysiological monitoring (EEG, heart rate, skin conductance, pupil dilation and eye movements), video registration of facial expression, recordings of applause level, and attention as determined by subsequent memory for events in performance. Squirring has been used as a boredom indicator, with seats being wired to record buttock movements, the presumption being that attentive people sit still and fidget less.'  
(Wilson, p.48)

All the existing research with audiences has been into audience *reaction*. To determine an audiences' awareness of and attitudes to gender casting and so close the loop between writer, director, actors and audience, it was necessary to set up a controlled experiment into audience *perception*. This experiment I believe to be the first controlled investigation into audience perception.

### The Purpose of the Experiment

To determine the extent to which the spectator is aware of the base-gender of an actor when that actor is playing a character that is their gender-other. Ancillary hypotheses will relate perception of gender by audience to theories of performance based on gender schema that result from the research with actors detailed in the previous chapter.

### Methodology

The experiment followed an *Independent Groups Design* with each group experiencing *One Variable* in a *Multiple Audience situation*. There were *Independent Variables* and *Four Conditions*.

The experiment used a scene from a Shakespeare play chosen with as far as possible, an equal balance of male and female roles in terms of number of characters, number of lines spoken by each character, and consequent atmosphere and significance. The scene was played in *Four Different Versions* before *Four Different Audiences*:

1. With male actors playing the male characters and female actors playing the female characters. This was the control.
2. With female actors playing all the characters.
3. With male actors playing all the characters.
4. With female actors playing the male characters and male actors playing the female characters.

The performances were given in front of a live audience over four nights as a



‘curtain raiser’ to the SOHO group’s production of Twelfth Night (directed by myself) at the Tristan Bates Theatre in London’s Covent Garden on Monday 15th, Tuesday 16th, Thursday 18th and Friday 19th September 1997. The experiment was not publicised and the audience for Twelfth Night were given no indication that they were to see an extra performance until they were seated in the theatre. This was in order to ensure as far as possible that the audiences were representative theatre audiences and not modified because of being a part of experimental research. As far as possible then, the audiences were representative theatre-going audiences of the kind that might be expected to watch a performance of a Shakespeare play. Each performance was introduced by myself with no indication as to what the research was attempting to investigate but offering the scene as an extra to the evening’s entertainment. After the scene was performed, the audience were given a questionnaire which they were asked to complete during a short interval.

### The Questionnaire

The questionnaire asked a series of seven structured questions none of them *directly* about gender, followed by an open question inviting ‘any further comments on the performance you have just seen.’ There were then a further five structured questions to ascertain the demographic nature of the respondents covering age, gender, sexuality and theatre-going habits.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Date:

Thank you very much for watching this short scene from Hamlet and agreeing to answer this questionnaire. Please answer the questions as quickly as possible.

**It is your immediate responses to what you have seen that we need.**

About the performance you have just seen:

1. How many characters were there?

2. How many actors were there?

3. How suitable were the actors for the characters they played?

Suitable ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Unsuitable

4. How suitable were the costumes to the performance?:

Suitable ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Unsuitable

5. Have you ever seen a live performance of Hamlet? YES/NO

6. Have you ever seen a film of Hamlet? YES/NO

7. Here is a list of twelve things you might have noticed about the performance. Please number 1,2 and 3 in order of prominence the three things that you most noticed about the performance.

- |                           |                             |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| The age of the actors     | The ability of the actors.  |
| The lighting              | The make-up                 |
| The gender of the actors. | The music.                  |
| The costumes.             | Voices/accents              |
| The hair.                 | The sexuality of the actors |
| The language.             | Something else :.....       |

8. Do you have any further comments on the performance you have just seen?



About yourself (please answer as many or as few questions as you choose):

A. Your age:

B. Your sex:

C. Approximately how often to do you see live theatre:

Once a week or more ☐ Once a month ☐ Less than once a month ☐

D. Your occupation:

E. How would you describe your sexuality?:

Straight ☐ Gay/Lesbian ☐ Bi-sexual ☐

This is an anonymous questionnaire. If, however, you would like to be informed of the results of the research or details of other performances by **the SOHO group** please let us have your name and address on the attached slip.

Of the structured questions it was on numbers three and seven that the research was based. Questions 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 were added as distracters. Question three asked 'How suitable were the actors cast to the characters they played?' with a binary polarity scale of 1 to 10 where 1 was 'unsuitable' and 10 was 'suitable'. Question 7 listed ten things an audience 'might have noticed about the performance.' Respondents were asked to number in order the three things they *most* noticed about the performance.

### The Scene

The scene played was a conflation of Act Two Scene One and Act Three Scene One of Hamlet with some of Polonius's lines redistributed to Claudius and Gertrude:

Cla. How now, Ophelia? What's the matter?

Oph. O my lord, my lord, I have been so affrighted!

Cla. With what, i' th' name of God?

Oph. My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,  
 Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac'd,  
 No hat upon his head, his stockings foul'd,  
 Ungart'ed, and down-gyved to his ankle;  
 Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,  
 And with a look so piteous in purport  
 As if he had been loosed out of hell  
 To speak of horrors- he comes before me.

Cla. Mad for thy love?

Oph. My lord, I do not know,  
 But truly I do fear it.

Ger. What said he?

Oph. He took me by the wrist and held me hard;  
 Then goes he to the length of all his arm,  
 And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,  
 He falls to such perusal of my face  
 As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so.  
 At last, a little shaking of mine arm,  
 And thrice his head thus waving up and down,  
 He rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound  
 As it did seem to shatter all his bulk  
 And end his being. That done, he lets me go,  
 And with his head over his shoulder turn'd  
 He seem'd to find his way without his eyes,  
 For out o' doors he went without their help  
 And to the last bended their light on me.

Ger. This is the very ecstasy of love,  
 Whose violent property fordoes itself  
 And leads the will to desperate undertakings  
 As oft as any passion under heaven  
 That does afflict our natures. I am sorry.

Cla. What, have you given him any hard words of late?

Oph. No, my good lord; but, as you did command,  
 I did repel his letters and denied  
 His access to me.

Cla. That hath made him mad.

We will closely send for Hamlet hither,  
 That he, as 'twere by accident, may here  
 Affront Ophelia.

Will we so bestow ourselves that, seeing unseen,  
 We may of their encounter frankly judge  
 And gather by him, as he is behav'd,  
 If't be th' affliction of his love, or no,  
 That thus he suffers for.

Queen. Ophelia, I do wish

That your good beauties be the happy cause  
 Of Hamlet's wildness. So shall I hope your virtues  
 Will bring him to his wonted way again,  
 To both your honours.

Oph. Madam, I wish it may.

Cla. I hear him coming. Swiftly, let's withdraw.

*[Enter Hamlet.]*



Oph. Good my lord,

How does your honour for this many a day?

Ham. I humbly thank you; well, well, well.

Oph. My lord, I have remembrances of yours

That I have longed long to re-deliver.

I pray you, now receive them.

Ham. No, not I!

I never gave you aught.

Oph. My honour'd lord, you know right well you did,

And with them words of so sweet breath compos'd

As made the things more rich. Their perfume lost,

Take these again; for to the noble mind

Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.

There, my lord.

Ham. Ha, ha! Are you honest?

Oph. My lord?

Ham. Are you fair?

Oph. What means your lordship?

Ham. That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty.

Oph. Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?

Ham. Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once.

Oph. Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

Ham. You should not have believ'd me; for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you not.

Oph. I was the more deceived.

Ham. Get thee to a nunnery! Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious; with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do, crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves all; believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where's your father?

Oph. At home, my lord.

Ham. Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in his own house. Farewell.

Oph. O, help him, you sweet heavens!

Ham. If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery. Go, farewell. Or if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go; and quickly too. Farewell.

Oph. O heavenly powers, restore him!

Ham. I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another. You jig, you amble, and you lisp; you nickname God's creatures and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't! it hath made me mad. I say, we will have no more marriages. Those that are married already- all but one- shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go. *[Exit.]*

Oph. O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!



The courtier's, scholar's, soldier's, eye, tongue, sword,  
 Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,  
 The glass of fashion and the mould of form,  
 Th' observ'd of all observers- quite, quite down!  
 And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,  
 That suck'd the honey of his music vows,  
 Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,  
 Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;  
 That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth  
 Blasted with ecstasy. O, woe is me  
 T' have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

*[Enter King.]*

King. Love? his affections do not that way tend;  
 Nor what he spake, though it lack'd form a little,  
 Was not like madness. There's something in his soul  
 O'er which his melancholy sits on brood;  
 And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose  
 Will be some danger; which for to prevent,  
 I have in quick determination  
 Thus set it down: he shall with speed to England  
 For the demand of our neglected tribute.  
 Haply the seas, and countries different,  
 With variable objects, shall expel  
 This something-settled matter in his heart,  
 Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus  
 From fashion of himself. What think you on't?  
 Ger. It shall do well. But yet do I believe  
 The origin and commencement of his grief  
 Sprung from neglected love.- How now, Ophelia?  
 You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said.  
 We heard it all.

The scene was chosen because of the equal balance of two male characters (Hamlet and Claudius) and two female characters (Ophelia and Gertrude). Act Three Scene One was also a scene referred to by both Giles Havergal and Toby Robertson along with the Closet Scene in the play as being one that particularly benefitted from being played by a single gender cast (in the case of their productions all male).

I had directed Hamlet with an all-female cast for the SOHO group in the Spring and Summer of 1997 and the production had played with great success both in Britain and France. For the purposes of the experiment the version of



the text and the details of the staging were replicated from that production in order to present a piece of representative theatre that had not been especially created for the experiment and was therefore as unaffected as possible by the nature of the research. Some of the original cast were involved in recreating the staging three months after the previous performances. In rehearsal the all-female version was recreated first the other versions being staged by bringing in the other actors one by one as a sort of relay. In order to *control the stimuli* every attempt was made to ensure that the details of the staging (blocking, physicality, violence, kissing, degrees of emotion, atmosphere) were the same in each of the gender different performances. Costumes were simple and gender indicative: a skirt for Ophelia and a dress for Gertrude; trousers for Claudius; a boiler suit for Hamlet. All the cast wore black Chinese slippers. There was a very light white face make up for all the cast which was gender neutral. The cast were chosen so that physical factors such as height, weight and age were common to the actors playing each part irrespective of their genders.

The majority of the audiences at all the performances appeared happy to complete the questionnaires although at each performance there were a number of refusals and a few complaints at what was seen as an imposition. The number of people in the audience varied from night to night with the first audiences (at the control performance) being the smallest. Not all completed questionnaires provided usable answers. For instance some respondents gave

no answer to Question 3. Others ticked more than three items on Question 7 or did not number their answers in any order. All these responses were discarded in compiling the statistics.

Question 7 asked the audience to number in order the three things from a list of ten that they noticed most about the performance they had just watched. In the tables below the first column lists those factors given as first choice (ie most noticed); the second column gives the second choice and the third column the third choice. All figures are expressed as percentages of the total responses.



Chapter 8

Table 1

Control Performance

Male characters played by male actors; female characters played by female actors.

<i>First</i>		<i>Second</i>		<i>Third</i>	
Make Up	33%	Sexuality	20%	Lighting	13%
Ability	26%	Make Up	20%	Gender	13%
Costumes	20%	Costumes	13%	Costumes	13%
Gender	7%	Language	13%	Language	13%
Language	7%	Ability	13%	Ability	13%
Other	7%	Voice	13%	Sexuality	13%
		Age	7%	Hair	7%
				Make Up	7%
				Other	7%

The gender of the actors was not an issue in the first performance when the male parts were played by male actors and the female parts by female actors. This was the control. One respondent indicated actor gender as the factor they most noticed. None noted it as their second factor and only two mentioned it as their third factor. In a performance where actor gender was not an issue it was tangible factors that were most noticed: the make up (33% of first choices, 20% of second choices), costumes (20%; 13%; 13% respectively) and

lighting. Two intangible factors make a strong impression. After the make up it is the actors' ability that is most noticed by the audience, something that is wholly subjective. The most chosen as the second factor is the sexuality of the actors, something about which the audience can have no knowledge and about which they must have made conclusions based on assumption rather than fact. Actor sexuality was chosen by no respondent as their first item.



Chapter 8

Table 2

All characters played by female actors.

<i>First</i>		<i>Second</i>		<i>Third</i>	
Gender	33%	Gender	29%	MakeUp	17%
Ability	26%	Make Up	19%	Gender	10%
Music	10%	Ability	14%	Costumes	10%
Age	5%	Language	10%	Hair	10%
Lighting	5%	Costumes	7%	Ability	10%
Costumes	5%	Sexuality	7%	Sexuality	10%
Hair	5%	Voice	5%	Other	10%
Make Up	5%	Hair	5%	Voice	7%
Sexuality	5%	Music	2%	Lighting	4%
Voice	2%	Lighting	2%	Language	4%
				Music	4%

At the second performance, with an all female cast, gender became the item most noticed by the audience (33% first factor; 29% second factor; 10% third factor), make up was the strongest second choice (5%; 19% and 17% respectively) and again the actors’ ability is one of the most important things that the audience noticed (26%, 14%; 10%). With an all-female cast however, the sexuality of the actor seems of little importance to the audience, or perhaps is less easily assumed. (5%; 7%; 10%).

Chapter 8

Table 3

All characters played by male actors.

<i>First</i>		<i>Second</i>		<i>Third</i>	
Gender	48%	Ability	21%	Costumes	18%
Ability	24%	Gender	18%	MakeUp	18%
Make Up	9%	Sexuality	15%	Sexuality	15%
Music	6%	Make Up	12%	Ability	12%
Age	3%	Costumes	9%	Gender	9%
Lighting	3%	Hair	9%	Language	9%
Voice	3%	Voice	6%	Music	6%
Other	3%	Age	6%	Hair	6%
		Language	3%	Age	3%
				Voice	3%

The third performance was with an all male cast and here the gender of the actor becomes even more noticed by the audience, one half of the respondents (48%) citing it as the factor they notice most and a further 18% putting it as their second choice. The perceived ability of the actors was the other most important factor (24%; 21%; 12%) with make up being a strong third factor (9%; 12%; 18%). Again the audience noticed what they perceived to be the sexuality of the actors and to a significantly greater degree than with an all female cast (0%; 15%; 15%).



Chapter 8

Table 4

Male characters played by female actors; female characters played by male actors.

<i>First</i>		<i>Second</i>		<i>Third</i>	
Gender	50%	Ability	23%	Gender	18%
Ability	9%	Costumes	18%	Ability	14%
Lighting	5%	Make Up	18%	Voice	14%
Costumes	5%	Hair	9%	Sexuality	14%
Hair	5%	Language	9%	Costumes	9%
Language	5%	Voice	9%	Hair	9%
Make Up	5%	Sexuality	9%	Language	9%
Music	5%	Gender	5%	Make Up	9%
Voice	5%			Music	5%
Sexuality	5%				
Other	5%				

At the final performance, with a complete gender switch of actors, male actors playing the female parts and female actors playing the male parts, gender was again noticed by half the audience (50%) before any other factor but by far fewer as a second choice than with an all male cast, though more noticed it as their third choice (50%; 5%; 18%). It is again the perceived ability of the actors that makes the strongest secondary factor (9%; 23%; 14%) but with

costume being ahead of the make up as a third choice (5%; 18%; 9%). The sexuality of the actor as perceived by the audience becomes much less important (5%; 9%; 14%) as if it is impossible to make assumptions about sexuality with a complete gender reversal.

We can conclude not only that an audience is aware of the genders of the actors in a performance but that an audience's awareness of gender is determined by:

- a) whether a cast is double gendered or single gendered.
- b) the relationship between the genders of the actors and the genders of the characters they are playing.

Where there is no cross gender casting an audience does not notice the gender of the actors. Where there is complete cross gender casting a majority of the audience is aware of the genders of the actors. Where the performance of mixed gender characters is played by a cast of a single gender, the audience is more aware of the gender of the actors than in a mixed gender cast and is as aware of the gender of actors in an all female cast as in an all male cast (average 24%; 25%).

We can also conclude that an audience makes assumptions about the sexuality of the actors it is watching and that these assumptions are based not on the gender of the characters played but on the gender mix of the acting company



and the nature of the cross gender casting.

These findings would seem to indicate that an audience will draw a variety of conclusions, assumptions and inferences from what it sees on stage beyond the control of actor or director but that the nature of cross gender casting can itself lead to assumptions and inferences in the audience. What the figures do not tell us is what the attitude of the audience is to its perception of gender and its assumptions about sexuality. The responses to the open question on the questionnaire do allow us some insight into this.

At the first performance (with no cross gender casting) comments were few and primarily based around what might be called the interpretation of the scene:

‘Fascinating to see the lines chopped up and redistributed.’

The second performance (all female cast) provoked many more responses but very few comments on the gender or sexuality of the actors. It was as if the cross gender casting made the audience more aware of and attentive to the performance. Typical comments were: ‘dramatic and focused and therefore worked very well,’ and ‘the slight modernisation of the costumes and set put more emphasis on the acting which was good.’ One respondent, a 26 year old gay man, ‘felt distracted by the performance of a female in the role of Hamlet’ but made no mention of the female in the role of Claudius. A number

commented on the passion and emotional depth of the scene:

‘The scene seemed sexier and more passionate than I remembered.’ (A 33 year old gay man)

‘I liked the dynamic between the actors - the way in which they were all very different/varied in look, stature and sexuality (?)’ (26 year old bi-sexual woman). This question mark of the respondent indicates an awareness of the difficulty of determining sexuality.

‘It seemed much less staid ‘Shakespeare’ and more emotional than I have seen before - more sexual and more violent than I remembered.’ (31 year old gay man).

‘Abnormality of the intense passion in the scene played by women made it more intense, but not in a sexual way.’ (20 year old straight woman).

It was the all male performance which brought out the strongest and most negative comments about the cross gender casting. It also brought comments about the convincingness of the cross gender playing though there was no consensus of opinion as to whether the acting was convincing or not.

‘Gertrude was too much like a man playing a woman’ (26 year old gay man)

‘What is the point?’ (56 year old straight man)

‘I was paying more attention to the interaction between the all male cast than the text so didn’t pick up enough of what was happening in the scene.’ (26 year old straight man)

Only one respondent noticed any special passion or emotion in the scene:



‘Not too clear but strong emotionally.’ (24 year old straight man)

‘I find the P.C. element of men as women in an age when it is unnecessary annoyed me. I found I was distracted by the male kissing for the wrong reasons and I wanted to concentrate on the acting.’ (Gay man, age unknown)

This was the only performance in which the kiss between Hamlet and Ophelia was mentioned by the audience. Another (25 year old) gay man asked:

‘Am I supposed to be shocked by two men kissing?’

And it was not only gay men who found the kiss a problem:

‘The kiss drew unnecessary attention to the actors’ gender.’ (18 year old straight woman)

One respondent made particular reference to the make up:

‘I was first hit by the make up - sexuality no problem for me, nor age of actors, nor gender.’ (40 year old gay man)

The final performance with male actors in the female roles and female actors in the male roles excited no emotional comments about the gender casting but did lead to many considered and thoughtful comments:

‘I do find the gender swapping idea intriguing,’ noted a 31 year old gay man, while a 32 year old straight woman found the performance:

‘Brave, but confusing using opposite sexes in the roles.’ For some the make up was again an issue. As many mentioned it as mentioned the cross-casting:

‘The make up was distracting.’

‘I found the make up intruding.’ (29 year old straight woman)

A 30 year old gay woman was more specific about the make up and related it to the gender issues:

‘I wasn’t sure about the make up - I thought the costumes and gender issues were excellent but the make up made it comedic which didn’t seem right.’<sup>1</sup>

Two respondents dealt with the issue of playing gender opposite:

‘At first gender differences vied with the ability of the actors and may have made me think they were not as able as they are. That, on reflection is due to how I expect the timbre of the voice to be, the delivery of the lines and the feminine/masculine roles. The language is very gender-specific, which I had not noticed before. So in the end I found this interesting as the roles were ‘swopped’ but you weren’t in ‘drag’ i.e. pretending to be the opposite sex.’

(40 year old gay woman)

This was the only respondent at any of the performances to mention *expectation* of gender and to raise the issue of drag, talking of drag as a form of *pretence* which was absent from the performance, implying a gender *truthfulness* in what was being watched as opposed to an artifice that would come from a ‘drag’ performance. A 33 year old gay man took a different view commenting that it would be:

‘Better if the gender roles are played in a straighter fashion (more natural) i.e.

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<sup>1</sup> A 28 year old gay man was only concerned about a specific item of costume: ‘There is *no* excuse for a Bolero jacket!’



girls playing boys not so butch boys playing girls not so camp.'

There was in fact no deliberate attempt by the actors to play either 'butch' or 'camp' both of which imply a gender role playing of stereotypes or even caricature. The actors, as we shall see below, played only for the emotional truth as they saw it of their character irrespective of their own base gender or that of their fellow actors.

It was a 37 year old straight woman who in her brief comment on the performance noticed this. Of the male actor playing Ophelia she wrote:

'Ophelia most impressive, not playing camp or butch.'

As we have seen then, no one in the audience of the first performance where male actors played male roles and female actors female roles commented on the gender of the actors. On subsequent performances the gender of the actors was commented on but was reacted to in different ways. The audience noticed, or thought they noticed, not only the gender of the actors but their sexuality and their ability. But an audience can never know (unless it brings with it some outside knowledge) the sexuality of an actor. Nor can an audience, unless there is a reference explicit or implicit, know the sexuality of the character. Yet this research shows that an audience not only believes itself able to recognise sexuality but to differentiate between the sexualities of actor and character.

The recognition of an actor's ability is also something that an audience cannot

know. It can believe that it can differentiate between actor and character so as to be able to judge the actor's ability and the degree to which it matches the demands of playing the part. But this can only be an assumption as with the recognition of sexuality. The implication of this is that Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt* is ever present; that an audience is constantly distanced enough from what it is watching as to be able to make distinctions between what is the actor and what is the character, and even to judge the interface between the two where an actor's *ability* intervenes between performer and role. There was however no deliberately Brechtian alienation device used in the performances except, perhaps, the white face make up.<sup>2</sup> Could it be that cross-gender casting of itself leads to Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt*? That cross-gender casting continuously draws attention to itself? This is not something that can be answered by this experiment where the brevity of the performances allowed for little beyond the establishment of the theatrical conventions being employed. Brecht described his *verfremdungseffekt*, or A-effect, as 'just a widely-practised way of drawing one's own or someone else's attention to a thing.... The A-effect consists in turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one's attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar,

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<sup>2</sup> Is white face an inherently alienating device? If so can the same be said of black face? Is an audience continually aware of a white actor playing Othello because of the make-up? As we have seen white-face is a part of the French tradition, employed by Mnouchkine in her Twelfth Night.



striking and unexpected.' (Brecht, p.143)

It has been argued above (Havergal *et al*) that in a full production such cross-casting is soon forgotten as an audience enters into the world of the play. (Just as in an opera the audience soon forgets the performers are singing.) But this research shows that this is not the case; that the distancing or alienation effect is so strong with cross gender casting that, as with white face make up, an audience is constantly aware of it. This is not though something that is inherently either positive or negative. The result in the audience of the alienation is dependent on at least two factors:

1. the attitude of the individual audience member: different members of the same audience will see different things even though they are watching the same thing.
2. the gender combinations of the actors and characters involved.

It is also possible that socio-sexual attitudes are a further factor and this I discuss below.

Does the alienation effect, which demonstrates to an audience that they are watching an actor playing a part, itself trick an audience into believing that they see more than they actually do? For the Brechtian actor is only demonstrating the character. The Brechtian actor says nothing about, shows nothing of, themselves.

What is also shown by the research is that cross-gender casting has more than an alienating effect in a Brechtian sense. Such casting can genuinely alienate an audience in the sense of turning the audience, in part at least, against what it is watching. Such casting can bring an awareness of the artifice of performance at such a level that it interferes with enjoyment and appreciation of the performance itself.

Here we return to theatrical convention; to what an audience finds it acceptable to watch. For the audiences taking part in this experiment it was the all-male performance that proved the most problematic, even after the more than thirty years during which all-male productions of Shakespeare have become re-established as an acceptable stage convention - the entire theatre-going lifetime of most of the audience members at these performances.

Male actors as male characters and female actors as female characters kissing on stage occasions no comment. Similarly male actors as female characters and female actors as male characters kissing on stage occasions no comment. Female actors as male characters kissing female actors as female characters is acceptable and can be perceived as enhancing the quality - in terms of truthfulness, passion, emotion - of a scene. But male actors as male characters kissing male actors as female characters is thought by a significant proportion of the audience to be unacceptable, disturbing or distasteful irrespective of



gender or sexuality of the audience member.

Yet, as we have seen, the plays were written to be performed by all male casts. What was theatrically acceptable in the 1590s - what was not only the dominant but the only stage convention available - in the 1990s becomes theatrically unacceptable even in a world of pluralistic stage convention where any number of staging conventions are available in London from any number of styles and cultures. The dominant theatrical convention of a society remains the one that an audience accepts without question. Male actors playing male characters with female actors playing female characters will always pass without comment in a society where that is the dominant stage convention. Yet historically, as we have seen, this is a very recent stage convention.

What is the link between theatrical acceptability and social acceptability? The 1960s were a period in which social conventions about the performance and demonstration and indication of gender were being challenged and new conventions established. It was this flux in social conventions about gender that allowed - in 1967 - for the first time in 400 years - the theatrical conventions of gender casting and portrayal to be challenged and the National theatre to stage its all male As You Like It.

What is perhaps surprising is that challenges to the theatrico-conventional

orthodoxy are still unacceptable even to a sophisticated metropolitan audience in central London. For the actors involved in the experiment, the factors differentiating the different gender cast performances were very wide ranging and not necessarily directly gender related. The male actor playing Claudius felt that:

‘None of the differences I noticed were really gender related. They were fundamentally down to

- familiarity with the role...
- nervousness levels...
- interpretation...’

Of his male and female actor Gertrudes:

‘physically the two were similar and in both cases the levels of physical contact were the same and equally warm and emotional; vocally they used similar tones.’

What the audience noticed in the scenes they watched was not therefore necessarily what the actors in the same scenes were aware of or felt to be most relevant.

For the female actor playing Hamlet, the issue of gender was central to her view of the character:

‘Generally speaking my approach to playing a man was to follow the emotional journey of the character, himself struggling to reconcile himself with his culture’s expectations of him to be ‘masculine’ - in their terms. Thus



the gender was as much a part of Hamlet's struggle for identity as any of his other worries. I was also helped by the decision to play him young, so his gender anxiety was put in context of his anxieties about identity and of growing up.'

This points to the theory explored above that an actor constructs the gender of the character they are playing irrespective of his or her own base gender and that the base gender of the actor is largely irrelevant to the actor themselves even though it may be much more of an issue to the audience watching the performance. In other words the actor does not notice their own gender whilst performing only that of the character, what the actors playing the women in the 1967 As You Like It felt to be 'the safety of playing for character as opposed to impersonating women' (above, p.59); whereas an audience may be very aware of the gender of the actor. For this female actor playing Hamlet, unlike the male actor playing Claudius, as with the audience the combination of actor genders was important:

'...playing opposite a male Ophelia...I found myself 'trying' much harder to act like a man...and I had to work harder to be cruel and violent (even though the actor playing Ophelia was incredibly vulnerable and scared) thus losing the sense of Hamlet's self destruction and ambivalence I had with a female Ophelia.'

To what extent are such acting problems the result of the gender of the other actor or the gender of constructed character? As the female actor playing

Ophelia noted:

‘It is very difficult to know whether the differences were due to men playing the characters or to the fact that different actors were playing the characters.’

The female actor playing Hamlet concluded that:

‘In a same sex cast, gender became a virtual irrelevance - truth of relationships and the situation being the priority in performance.’ This of course was her experience in a single gender cast where the gender was female. The female actor playing Claudius had similar experiences and was not new to playing a male Shakespearean character but,

‘It had always been in an all-female production opposite other women. I think this was the first time I had played a man with an actual man playing opposite me. I found the experience very strange indeed. I felt quite exposed as a woman, rather fake and unable to convince myself of my masculinity. Not something I’ve had a problem with before. *This was in spite of the fact that the male actor was playing a woman (Gertrude).* [My italics] I felt physically small and unable to muster up the vocal and physical presence I felt I needed, although this wasn’t a problem when Gertrude was played by a woman considerably taller than me, so clearly it wasn’t just size that was the issue.’

That tall female actor playing Gertrude had the same response to playing the same character with different gender casts:

‘I found it harder to act with the men....they seemed to have more authority, either with voice or physicality, therefore it was harder to break through to their vulnerability, harder to feel relaxed physically with the blokes - trust



women and what they do far more than men.’

The experiment set out to determine

- the extent to which a spectator is aware of the base gender of the actor when that actor is playing a character that is their gender other.
- the perception of audiences of gender casting.

the acceptability of cross-gender casting by audiences.

The research has shown that:

1. An audience is aware of the genders of the actors in a performance but that the degree of awareness is determined by:
  - a. whether the cast is double gendered or single gendered.
  - b. the relationship between the genders of the actors and the genders of the characters they are playing.

The research has also shown that:

2. An audience makes assumptions about the sexuality of the actors it is watching based on the gender mix of the acting company and the nature of the cross gender casting.
3. An audience finds an all-female cast playing characters of both genders more acceptable to watch than an all-male cast.
4. Cross gender casting can both enhance or detract from an audience’s appreciation of a performance and that this is determined by:
  - a. the attitude of the individual audience member.

- b. the gender combinations of the actors and characters involved.
- 5. The dominant theatrical convention of a society is the only one which an audience will accept without question.
- 6. That social and theatrical conventions determine an audience's acceptance of the portrayal of gender on the stage.



## CHAPTER 9

I used to believe that any convention on stage was possible; that an audience would accept whatever conventions were being used in a production provided that those conventions were made clear at the start of the performance; that the control of the director extended to the establishment of any convention at the start of the performance - a commonly held view amongst directors. (Havergal *et al* above) As Williams said above, 'you could do it with trained monkeys if you like'. For me that has always been one of the excitements of theatre - its endless possibility of convention. My belief as a director had always been that the gender of the actor did not matter in casting a role any more than did their ethnicity; that fully integrated gender-blind and colour-blind casting was possible. That belief underpinned a whole cycle of Shakespeare productions and other work besides.

Now, I realise, I was wrong. That as this thesis has demonstrated, the issue of convention is much more complicated and subtle. There is, *pace* Peter Brook, no such thing as an empty space. (Brook, *passim*) As Quantum Theory tells us, as soon as that space is observed it changes. Quantum Theory states that by the very act of watching the observer affects the observed reality. Bohr's complementary principle (Bohr, 1949) applies to sub-atomic particles and it was not until 1998 that it was confirmed by experiment (Buks *et al*, 1998) The confirmation by the team at the Weizman Institute that at a sub-atomic level,

the greater the amount of 'watching' the greater the observer's influence on what takes place, echoes what we have seen to be the case with an audience watching the actor-particles in the atom of a stage performance. This principle that observation itself changes states can apply even to the seemingly empty state which is the performance space. The conventions expected by the spectator/observer change the space even if it is empty. Even before you place a signifier in that space, be it a chair, an actor, an Ibsonian gun, an audience brings their own implicit signifiers in terms of their expectation through the conventions that they are used to. There are expectations even in looking at a black box or a bare front cloth that alter what is seen even before it is shown.

### Lenses of Convention

There is always one dominant convention. Even in a multi-cultural society with many stage conventions at work, one set of conventions will always dominate and be the primary lenses through which the other conventions are viewed. For Samuel Pepys, returning to the theatre after the period of closure by the Puritans and seeing a woman played on stage by a woman for the first time, one dominant convention was being superseded by another. Once the new convention very rapidly became the dominant convention, the one which preceded it disappeared from usage and with it, for the better part of a century those Shakespeare plays, the cross-dressing comedies, which had been written for it.



But the lenses of convention, once recognised for what they are, are not necessarily limiting. Rather they can open up a whole spectrum of theatrical possibility. As Bornstein says, 'traditional form permits an audience to experience non-traditional content in relative safety.' (Bornstein, p.150) And conversely, as in the 1967 As You Like It demonstrates, the opposite is true. A non-traditional form can allow an audience to re-experience traditional content. Brecht's A-effect is not employed just by choice by the Brechtian director. It is ever present. Alienation has its effect even if a director does not employ it consciously and the degree of its effect is dependent upon the stage and social conventions dominant in the society or group viewing the performance. It can arise from the casting of gender. Pepys experienced the A-effect when seeing Kynaston play a woman on stage. An Elizabethan audience would have experienced it had they seen a woman playing a woman on stage. Shakespeare deliberately employed it in the Epilogue to As You Like It. A modern audience will experience it, as we have seen in the last chapter, to different degrees depending upon the nature and content of the gender casting. The lenses of convention will always prohibit any return to the *status quo ante*. Any alteration to convention will always leave the lens of the previous convention. The audience at the Old Vic in 1967, as demonstrated through the remarks of the critics above, could not return to a state of seeing through pre-Restoration eyes. All viewing of gender on stage becomes part, conscious or otherwise, of a Foucaultian discourse.

It is crucial for a director to be aware of this, otherwise in abandoning one convention one can create confusion (above, p.68) as happened to some degree with the 1967 As You Like It. An audience needs a convention or set of conventions and will always bring its own into the theatre with it, irrespective of the conventions a production employs. So whilst it is to some degree possible to establish conventions at the start of a performance - to demonstrate the conventions being employed as Mnouchkine does at the Cartoucherie where the audience enters the performing space through the actors applying their white face; Kemp as himself slowly drawing back the front cloth before becoming a Genetesque woman - which an audience will then accept, there can never be a *tabula rasa*. There is no empty space because the space is filled with the expectations of the audience implicit within the established conventions they bring into the performing space with them. An audience has filled the space before an actor has set foot in it. On a British stage, the audience still expects that actor to be a woman if the character being played is a woman, just as an audience watching Kabuki will expect that actor to be a man. Even if that expectation is confounded in advance, as at the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow, the audience will still view what it sees through the lens of the dominant convention and therefore read what it sees on stage in a different way.

The tyranny of the dominant convention means it is impossible to create a



*mise en abîme* but the function of alternative conventions, of the alternative theatre which grew up so rapidly in the wake of the 1967 As You Like It, is to allow for the revelations that come from a multiplicity of lenses. Each alternative convention adds a colour to the rainbow. The lenses act as prisms colouring with a halo what is seen. The tyranny of convention can be a powerful tool to allow a view of non-traditional material or traditional material in a new light.

Robertson (above, p.110) spoke of the actor having responsibility to his or herself, his or her character and the author but as we have seen the author is not a factor in the way in which an actor builds a character's Gender Schema and shows it on stage. But the intentions of the author and the conventions within which they are writing are the first lens through which what is shown on stage is viewed. Conventions mean different things to those employing them (writer, director, actor) from those viewing them (audience). For the actor this throws up a range of challenges the possibility of returning to the state of Foucaultian gender-neutrality found on an Elizabethan stage. Acting is more than mere mimesis. An actor's view of their own Gender Schema and that of the character they are playing is outside of the demands of convention and can therefore work within any convention. The actor has, as we have seen, to create or adapt a Gender Schema for their character irrespective of the biological sex of that character and , as Butler says:

'...gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts,.. gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained.' (Butler, p.3)

We no longer have Helms' androcentric stage, nor the androgynocentric stage which replaced it, but a stage which can accomodate any convention or combination of conventions of gender representation. Robertson spoke of the actor's job as being 'to encapsulate three different voices, those of the character, of the actor (him or herself) and of the author' (above, p.110) but we have seen in our experiment that this is not the case. The female actor will lose her own voice at the expense of that of their character, while a male actor will not. Mnouchkine's belief that there is an inherent difference between male and female actors is right but for the wrong reasons and has more to do with psychology than with politics; to do with an ability to empathise rather than social conditioning. It is as if an actor on being cast finds their Platonic other half in the character they are given, irrespective of sex or gender, but that a male actor distances himself from his other half while a female actor absorbs herself in them. For a female actor it is as if, in the words of the anthem of the New York Gay Men's Chorus, 'it seems when I found you it



was me I really found'.<sup>1</sup> The act of acting is different for men and for women. A male actor and a female actor act in inherently different ways. There is then a difference not just of convention and audience perception in having a single sex cast because a single sex casting will have all its actors creating their characters in the same way, relating to their characters in the same way and therefore presenting their characters to the audience in the same way. A bi-sex cast will have its actors building characters in two different ways, relating to their characters in two different ways and therefore presenting their characters to the audience in two different ways - irrespective of the gender or sex of the characters being played.

In building a character, an actor has to take account of the building of their own character. This is especially true of gender, the primary interface between character and audience, between individual and society, where an actor will already have built a Gender Schema - their own character - which will form the basis for the creation of the Gender Schema of their character, again irrespective of the sex of either actor or character. A single-gender cast working in a single way makes it easier to liminalise the gender of the actor, to move towards Foucault's Renaissance gender neutral, to form the emptiest of spaces for the performance of Shakespeare's cross-gender comedies. There

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<sup>1</sup> From Love Lives On, music and Lyrics by Barry Mann, Bruce Broughton, Cynthia Weilll, Will Jennings, CD, VC 791647-2

is then an inherent contradiction between the demands of the play and the convention within which Shakespeare was writing and the demands of the modern audience and the convention within which they are observing. As You Like It requires gender neutrality in its casting to be fully realised on stage but an late twentieth century British audience cannot read gender neutrality. Perhaps the play can only work as Noh or Kabuki. Perhaps Mnouchkine should not have given up her attempt to stage Twelfth Night with a single sex cast in Kabuki traditions. Perhaps white face with a single sex cast can help move towards that gender-neutrality.

Danny La Rue, the English female impersonator who according to Bryden so disliked the 1967 As You Like It, himself seems to believe in the idea of the gender neutral performer who can adopt any gender. Of himself he has said, “‘Actually, I’m nothing...nothing.’ A transvestite? He shakes his head. ‘That’s rather sad isn’t it?’, he says querulously. ‘To me, putting a dress on.... I might be putting on a robe for Shakespeare.’” (quoted Martin) The limits of make believe are limited only by the actor’s ability to wear the frocks of gender, real and metaphorical, and an audience’s ability to perceive through the infinite combinations of the lenses of gender.

But rather than leave the last word to a drag queen, it might be more appropriate to leave it with Shakespeare. Hamlet’s advice to the players echoes the comments of an actor in one of the workshops who spoke of the



necessity to *be* rather than to *do*. Shakespeare's most famous character elaborates on this idea and speaks of the need to avoid indication, avoid the assumption of physical and vocal excess, and instead to find the essence of the rôle, the truth of the scene by the holding, 'as 'twere, the mirror up to nature.' Hamlet's advice is a version of Cicero's definition of comedy as an imitation of life, a mirror of custom and an image of truth (*imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudini, imago veritatis*) and in that image of truth is the essence of acting.

## CHRONOLOGY

Professional productions since 1967 of the plays of Shakespeare in which cross-gender performance has been central to the casting. An attempt has been made to list every significant professional English language production in Britain. This is followed by details of some important European and North American productions.

### 1967

#### As You Like It

National Theatre Company at the Old Vic  
opened 3rd October  
Director: Clifford Williams  
Designer: Ralph Koltai  
All male cast.

### 1970

#### Hamlet

Citizen's Theatre Glasgow  
September  
Director: Giles Havergal  
Designer: Philip Prowse  
All male cast

### 1971

#### Twelfth Night

Citizen's Theatre, Glasgow  
May/June  
Director: Giles Havergal  
Designer: Philip Prowse  
All male cast

### 1972

#### Anthony and Cleopatra

Citizen's Theatre, Glasgow  
May  
Director: Giles Havergal



Designer: Philip Prowse  
Male actor (Jonathan Kent) as Cleopatra

### 1973

#### Pericles

Prospect Theatre Company  
June Leeds Playhouse and subsequent tour  
Set in the brothel at Mytilene, with extensive cross-dressing within the brothel.

### 1979

#### Macbeth

Citizen's Theatre, Glasgow  
February/March  
Director: Giles Havergal  
All male cast

#### Hamlet

Half Moon Theatre, London (opening production at new theatre)  
October/November  
Director: Rob Walker  
Designer: Mick Bearwish  
Hamlet played by female actor (Frances de la Tour), 'travelling players played by children'. Promenade production. 'Ms. de la Tour won't aim at a definitive *feminist* Hamlet; she will follow more in the tradition of Bernhardt - "I just wanted to play Hamlet"' (Ann McFerran, Time Out, 12/10/79, p.29) '[Ms de la Tour makes] mannered mileage out of playing the Prince.' (Michelene Wander, Time Out, 26/10/79, p.31)

### 1986

#### Hamlet

The Young Vic, London  
May/June  
Director: Ian Thompson  
Designer: Jackie Pilford  
A female Hamlet (Madeline Bellamy) in an otherwise gender-contiguous cast production.

#### The Taming of the Shrew

The Medieval Players  
Brentford Waterman's Arts Centre, Brentford, Middlesex and subsequent tour  
March

A male actor as Kate.

## 1987

### A Midsummer Night's Dream

The Deal Theatre Project

Astor Theatre, Deal, Kent

October

Director: Luke Dixon

Designer: Paul Dart

A double cast production with an all-female group of mechanicals alternating with an all-male group. Bottom played as a man by both a male and female actor.

### Romeo and Juliet

The Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh

January/February

Director: Mervyn Willis

Designer: Nick Sargent

Nurse: John Mitchell

A male actor as the nurse.

## 1988

### Hamlet

Compass Theatre Company, the New Ensemble (Sheffield)  
at the Woughton Centre, Milton Keynes and subsequent tour.

April/May

Director: Neil Sissons

Designer (costumes): Jenny Neville

A female actor (Helen Schlesinger) as Hamlet.

### A Midsummer Night's Dream

Solent People's Theatre

Broughton Village Hall and tour of local villages

September/October

Director/Adaptor: Sue Charman

Designer: Sarah Jane Ash

Lysander played *as a woman* by Julia Findlay; Hermia and Lysander played as a lesbian couple.

### Pericles

The Deal Theatre Project, Deal Castle, Kent

August

Director: Luke Dixon

Designer: Paul Dart



A wide variety of cross-casting.

1989

Macbeth

The Raving Beauties at Battersea Arts Centre  
November/December

Director: Frances Vioner

Macbeth: Greg Hicks

Lady Macbeth: Sue Jones-Davies

‘A rather bizarre production with actresses in several male roles. The intention was apparently to bring out the feminine qualities of the play.’ (quote from Shakespeare Survey 44, Cambridge 1992, N. Gavron p.196)

A Midsummer Night's Dream

The Lindsay Kemp Company  
Sadler's Wells Theatre, London  
July

Director: Lindsay Kemp

Designers: Lindsay Kemp and Sandy Powell

Production first seen in Rome in 1979 and given its British premier in 1983.

The Incredible Orlando, a male blind actor, was Titania.

Romeo and Juliet

The Deal Theatre Project, Walmer Castle, Kent  
August

Director: Luke Dixon

Designer: Paul Dart

Romeo: Eleanor Edmunds

Juliet: Claire Harrison

Lady Capulet: Noel Greig

Nurse: Dick Waring

Cross cast throughout including female actors as Romeo and Mercutio and male actors as Lady Capulet and the Nurse.

Timon of Athens

Red Shift at Croydon Warehouse and subsequent tour  
February - June

Director: Jonathan Holloway

Designer: Charlotte Humpston

Timon: Kate Fenwick

‘Scenes were re-ordered and new material with a feminist slant added.’ (N. Gavron, Shakespeare Survey 44, Cambridge 1992 p.201)

Twelfth Night

Traffic of the Stage at Pentameters Theatre Club, London and tour.

October/November

Director: Tom Leatherbarrow

Female actor (Mandy McIlwaine) as Feste.

1990

As You Like It

The Everyman, Liverpool

September/October

Director: John Doyle

Designer: Elizabeth Ashcroft

Female actor (Susan Jane Tanner) as Jacques

King Lear

Renaissance Theatre Company

Theatre Royal Newcastle and world tour

from June

Director: Kenneth Branagh

Designer: Jenny Tiramani

Female actor (Emma Thompson ) as the Fool

King Lear

The RSC at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford

from June

Director: Nicholas Hytner

Designer: David Fielding

Female actor ( Linda Kerr Scott) as the Fool

Richard III

Great Eastern Stage, Stamford Arts Centre and subsequent tour

February/March

Director Michael Fry

Designer: Neil Richardson

All male cast of six.

Twelfth Night

Oracle Productions, Holland Park Theatre, London,

June

Director: Peter Benedict

Male actor (William Conacher) doubling Viola and Sebastian

‘A production which emphasized the sexual ambiguities in the play, set in a 1930s film studio set.’ (N.Gavron, Shakespeare Survey 45, Cambridge 1993, p.156)

The Winter's Tale

Deal Theatre Project, Walmer Castle, Kent

August



Director: Luke Dixon

Designer: Paul Dart

Male actor as Hermione and other cross-casting throughout.

1991

As You Like It

Cheek by Jowl

Opera House Buxton and subsequent tour  
from September

Director: Declan Donnellan

Designer: Nick Ormerod

Rosalind: Adrian Lester

All male cast

The Comedy of Errors

The Drum Theatre, Plymouth Theatre Royal  
November

Director: Amanda Knott

Designer: Jo Hughes

All male cast. Period costume.

Hamlet

Theatre Clwyd, Mold, Wales and tour  
from November

Director: Toby Robertson

Designer: Alan Guinn

Hamlet: Geraint Wyn Davies

Gertrude: Martin McKellan

A male actor as Gertrud. 'Martin McKellan gives a poised, elegant performance, but it is a distraction: you find yourself thinking what could it possibly mean.' (John Peter, Sunday Telegraph, 15/12/91)

The Tempest

The Oxford Stage Company

The Lawn Lincoln and subsequent tour  
from July

Director: John Retallack

Female actor (Diane Parish) as Ariel

Twelfth Night

Cambridge Theatre Company

Playhouse Newcastle and tour  
from June

Director: Nancy Diuguid

Designer: Bettina Munzer

Viola/Sebastian: Pamela Nomvete  
Orsino/Olivia: Vernon Gudgeon

## 1992

### As You Like It

New Shakespeare Company, Regents Park, London

June-August

Director: Maria Aitkin

Designer: Bruno Santini

Jacques/ The Film Director: Bette Bourne

‘The Director/Jacques was played by the drag artist Bette Bourne. Some reviewers felt the conceit upstaged the play.’ (N. Gavron, Shakespeare Survey 47, Cambridge 1994 p.209)

### Much Ado About Nothing

The Liverpool Everyman

October/Nov

Director: John Doyle

Designer: Neil Warmington

A cast of eight, doubling male and female roles

### Twelfth Night

Past Imperfect Theatre Company at The Drill Hall Arts Centre, London

October

Director: Philip Osment

Designers: Charlotte Malik and Kevin McKeon

Extensively cross-cast production

### The Winter's Tale

Theatre de Complicité on tour

from January

Director: Annabel Arden

Designer: Ariane Gastambide

Mamillius/Paulina/Time/Old Shepherd: Kathryn Hunter

## 1993

### Macbeth

the SOHO group

from August

Director: Luke Dixon

All-female cast

tour including Lilian Baylis, Link Theatre London, Czech Republic and Russia



1994

Othello

Air Theatre at Attic Theatre, Wimbledon

April

All female cast

Pericles

The National Theatre Company at the Olivier Theatre, London

Director: Phyllida Lloyd

Decor: Mark Thompson

A variety of cross-casting, most notably Kathryn Hunter as Cerimon, Antiochus and the Bawd. 'Kathryn Hunter, who can metamorphose between characters and genders through movement as well as usual skills.' (Jann Parry, The Observer, 22/5/94)

The Tempest

Changeinspeak at Battersea Arts Centre, London

Director/Decor: Simon Blake

Female actors as Gonzalo (Claire Hawksley), Antonio (Fenella Woolgar), and Sebastian (Moirra Hamlyn), 'a cache of androgynous nobles straight out of Takarazuka.' (Sarah Abdullah, What's On, 26/10/94)

King Lear

Kaboodle Theatre Company at Bloomsbury Theatre, London, as part of tour.

October

Directors: Lee Beagley and Josette Bushell-Mingo

Female actor (Paula Simms) as the Fool

1995

Romeo and Juliet

Sound and Fury at the Duke of Cambridge Theatre, London

January

Director: Alex Chisholm

A male actor as the Nurse and a female actor as Friar Lawrence.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

the SOHO group on tour

from March

Director: Luke Dixon

Designer: Joanie Magill

Unusual doubling of Hippolyta with Oberon and Titania with Theseus.

Much Ado About Nothing

Hysterica Passio Theatre Company at Southwark Playhouse

April

Director: James Menzies-Kitchin

Women were cast in many male roles.

Richard II

The Royal National Theatre Company at the Cottesloe Theatre, London

June

Director: Deborah Warner

Designer: Hildegard Bechtler

A female actor (Fiona Shaw) as Richard.

Cymbeline

The Tabard Theatre, Chiswick, London

November

Director: David Rees Evans

An all-male cast

1996

As You Like It

Contraband Productions

Open Air, Queen's Park, London NW6

August

Director: Rachel Lasserson

Designer: Anna Bignold

Orlando: Pippa Hinchley; Rosalind: Anna Gerratt; Celia: Georgina Sutton;

Touchstone: Aitor Basauri

All female production except for Touchstone played by a Spanish man.

King Lear

Parthenos Productions

Tristan Bates Theatre, London

August/September

Director: Julia Damassa

Lear: Sue Rheum

Kent: Julia Damassa

Female actors as Lear and Kent; Cordelia and Fool doubled by female actor; rest traditionally cast.

Macbeth

Felis Sapiens Theatre Company

Duke of Cambridge Pub Theatre, London



November/December

Directors: Alistair Barrie and Julian Anderson

Designer: Tamsin Bell

Macbeth: Catherine Brady

All female cast.

The Taming of the Shrew

Rash Brilliance Performance Arts Company

Tower Theatre, Brighton and subsequent tour

May

Director: Melanie Bloor

Katherine: Andrew Weale

All male production: 'Full of sexual chemistry and coercion, played with style, wit and camp humour.' (quoted from handbill).

Twelfth Night

Action and Words Theatre Company

Woughton Centre, Milton Keynes and subsequent tour

November

Male characters played by female actors and vice versa

1997

King Lear

Leicester Haymarket and Young Vic Theatre, London

from February

Director: Hellene Kaut-Howson

Female actor (Kathryn Hunter) as Lear

Hamlet

the SOHO group, British tour with short seasons in London (The Africa Centre) and Paris (Le Jardin Shakespeare)

from February

Director: Luke Dixon

An all-female cast

Henry V

Shakespeare's Globe, London

May - September

Director: Richard Olivier

Margaret: Toby Cockerall

Isabel: Christian Camargo

Mistress Quickly: Vincent Brimble

Alice: Ben Walden

All male cast opens reconstruction of Shakespeare's theatre

Julius Caesar

Shakespeare's Globe (Education Department)

June/July

Director: John Adams

Female actors played Brutus and Cassius (Jo Howarth) out of necessity because director had to cast from company.

1998

The Tempest

Two-Way Mirror Theatre, London

Director: Zoë Reason

Female actor (Miriam Gordon) as Prospero

Macbeth

Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond

February/March

Director: Sam Walters

Lots of doubling led to female actors playing men including one actress playing Lady MacDuff, a witch, Donalbain and Young Seward

EUROPEAN AND NORTH AMERICAN PRODUCTIONS

1982

Twelfth Night

Théâtre du Soleil, Avignon Festival, Paris and tour

November

Director: Ariane Mnouchkine

Female actor (Clémentine Yelnick) as Sir Andrew

1990

KING LEAR

Schauspiel, Frankfurt

May

Director: Robert Wilson



The 77 year old German actor Marianne Hoppe played Lear. Wilson said of her: 'Marianne Hoppe is King Lear. She is the right age, she has the right face, the right image. And she has the strength to speak Shakespeare's language without interpreting it, simply, full of emotion. And I believe this comes closest to the work itself.' (from interview in Vorwort, Schauspiel Frankfurt, 23 (1990): 22)

### King Lear

Mabou Mines, New York

Director: Lee Breuer

All the roles were cross-dressed.

### The Merry Wives of Windsor

The Shakespeare Theatre, Washington

April

Director: Michael Kahn

Female actor (Pat Carroll) as Falstaff. Ms Carroll played the title role in Jonson's *Volpone* at the Shakespeare Theatre in April 1996.

## 1992

### Twelfth Night

The Goodman Theatre, Chicago

January/February

Director: Neil Bartlett

Orsino: Josette DiCarlo

Viola: Nikkieli Lewis

Sir Toby: Lola Pashalinski

Sir Andrew: Jeanette Schwaba

Extensively cross-cast. The theatre has 'not produced other shows that have dealt with cross-dressing to the extent that this production did; the only other examples of cross-gender casting ...are relatively minor (i.e., the casting of a man as Mrs. Shin in Brecht's The Good Person of Setzuan, or casting a woman in the traditionally male role of the Ghost of Christmas Present in A Christmas Carol.' (Steve Scott, Associate Producer in letter to the writer, 16/1/98)

## 1993

### King Lear

Necessary Angel at Berkeley Theatre Upstairs, Toronto

November

Director: Richard Rose

Originally a workshop production cast gender reversed with Patricia Hamilton as Lear; then a full production (in March 1995) cast gender blind with Janet Wright as Lear.

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